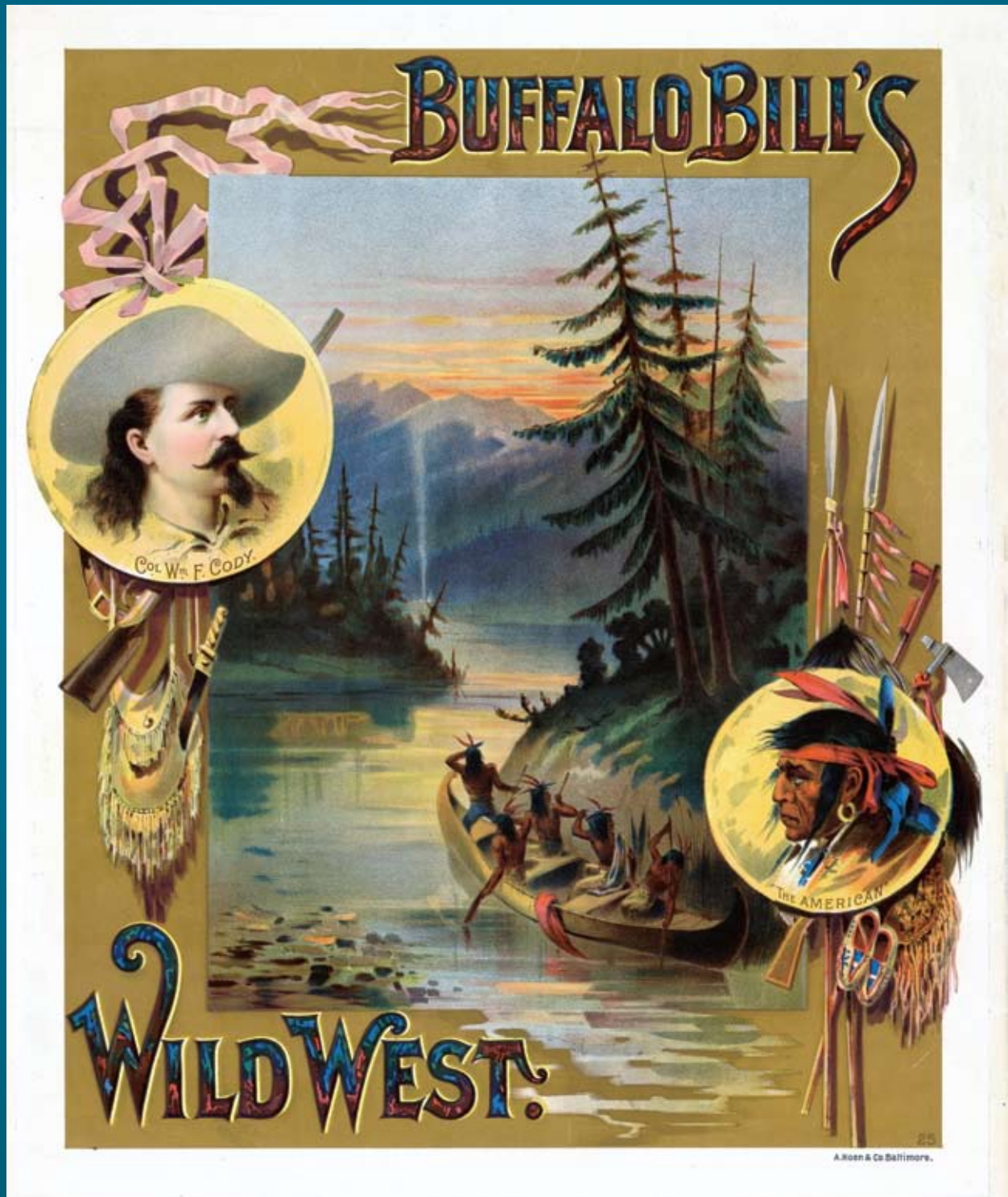


Bandwagon

The Journal of the Circus Historical Society Vol. 63 No. 3 2019



About the covers

The World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 was a gigantic fair in Chicago that commemorated the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus's landing on the American continent in 1492. The facilities included nearly 200 buildings, numerous canals and lagoons, and a midway dominated by the original Ferris wheel 264 feet in height. The Exposition drew an estimated 27 million people over a six-month period that began May 1, 1893.

In an effort to capitalize off of the Exposition's anticipated visitation, Buffalo Bill's Wild West tried to obtain permission to stage performances on the Chicago lakefront (see Chris Berry's article beginning on page 6). Failing at this endeavor, the show arranged to set up just a short distance from the Exposition's midway on Chicago's south side.

The lithographs reproduced on the front and back covers of this issue of *Bandwagon* were both designed by A. Hoen & Co. of Baltimore specifically to advertise the World's Fair appearance. The front cover features a graphically pleasing poster bearing the show's title. A line drawing of the same artwork was used in ads that ran in the city's newspapers throughout the 1893 engagement.

The back cover shows a lithograph that depicts "the Scout Buffalo Bill" during his earlier career on the American frontier. Lettering at the top provided notice of the show times as well as the location "Next to World's Fair," but does not inform the viewer of the actual name of the show.

Each of these exquisite posters for Buffalo Bill's Wild West was provided courtesy of Circus World Museum.

GTP

May we have your attention please!

CHS Board of Trustees election information and your official ballot are enclosed with this issue of *Bandwagon*. Please review both sides of this separate insert and return your completed ballot by the December 1, 2019 deadline.

Membership renewal forms are also enclosed. Your dues for calendar year 2020 are payable to Circus Historical Society by December 15, 2019.

Thank you for being a member of the Circus Historical Society.

Circus Historical Society

circushistory.org

Mission Statement

*"To preserve, promote, and share
through education the history and
cultural significance of the circus and
allied arts, past and present."*

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Bandwagon

The Journal of the Circus Historical Society

2019 Volume 63, Number 3

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From the Editor

As Time Steals Away

“Variables will. Constants aren’t.” Such were the insightful words I often heard during my long-ago days in civil construction. Not very reassuring in a world of bridges and dams, but nevertheless, a saying that generally had merit. Translation: Things change. Things end.

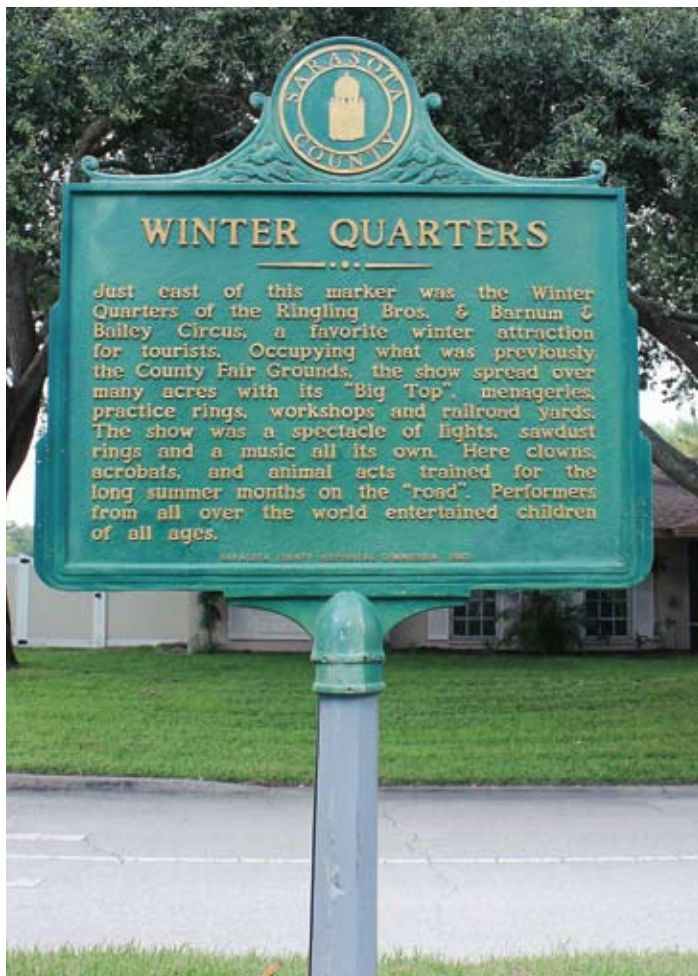
The circus has certainly been an example of this truism. Who would have imagined after seeing DeMille’s 1952 film that its subject, *The Greatest Show on Earth*, would cease operation as a tented circus only a few years later? Remember the movie’s first Sarasota scene when Brad Braden (Charlton Heston) walked through a bustling hubbub of practicing performers and load-out activity? Every trace of that vibrant winter quarters vanished years ago. A housing development and golf course now inhabit the place where snowbirds and tourists once flocked to the sights, sounds and scents of the Ringling show during its off-season. Today, very few Sarasota residents are aware that a magical city once existed just east of Beneva and 12th Street.

A few days before my 12th birthday, I first saw the legend-

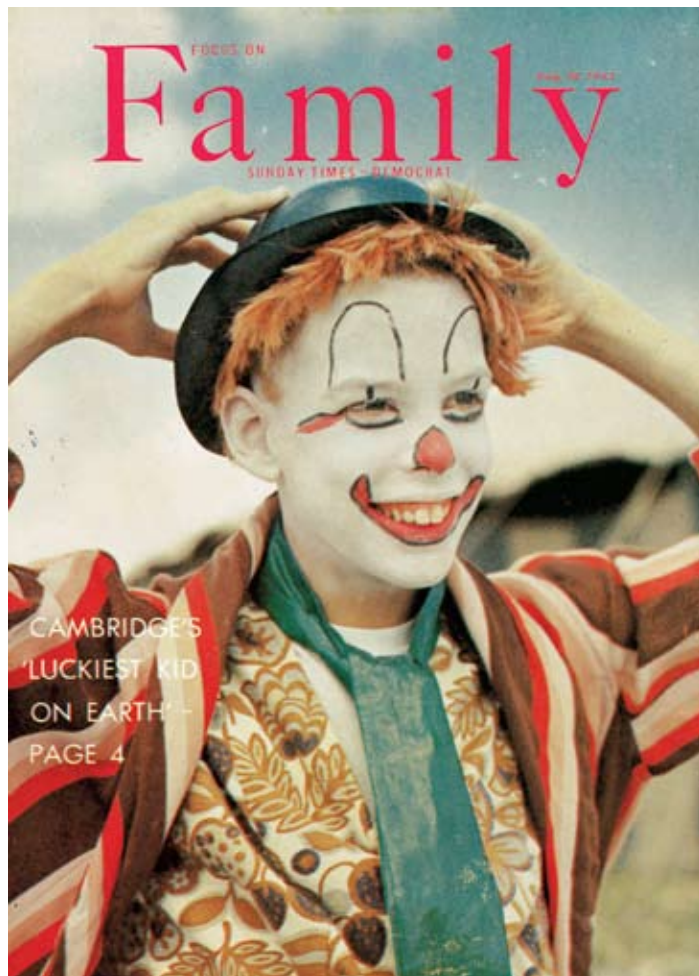
ary Clyde Beatty perform in the steel arena. What a thrilling subjugator of African lions and Bengal tigers! When Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. played Davenport, Iowa in 1963, I was recruited to be the “Luckiest Kid on Earth” and, as a clown for a day, the subject of a local newspaper’s Sunday magazine. This was not something I particularly enjoyed, save for the moment after Beatty’s spellbinding act when, dripping with sweat, he greeted me near the backdoor and asked if I was the new performer he had heard about. The next summer I was stunned to hear that Mr. Beatty had been diagnosed with cancer. He died in July 1965 at the age of 62. My childhood hero was gone.

Most profound of all, Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey ceased touring altogether and entered the realm of the past in the spring of 2017. After a lineage of 146 years of continuous operation, the circus of Barnum, Bailey, Ringling, North and Feld was no more. The reality was unfathomable to circus lovers.

Although chapters in circus history may end, they can and do live on in our hearts and memories. *Bandwagon* helps to refresh some of those recollections of yesterday. In this issue, Chris Berry provides us with his second installment on the story of the American circus through the lens of happenings at a single location. This time, “There Used to Be



Julie Parkinson photo



Sunday Times-Democrat (Davenport IA), August 18, 1963.



The Editor with Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. Circus, July 27, 1963.

a Circus Here” is an ambitious chronicle of the many shows that pitched their tented pavilions on the Chicago lakefront over a span of more than 150 years.

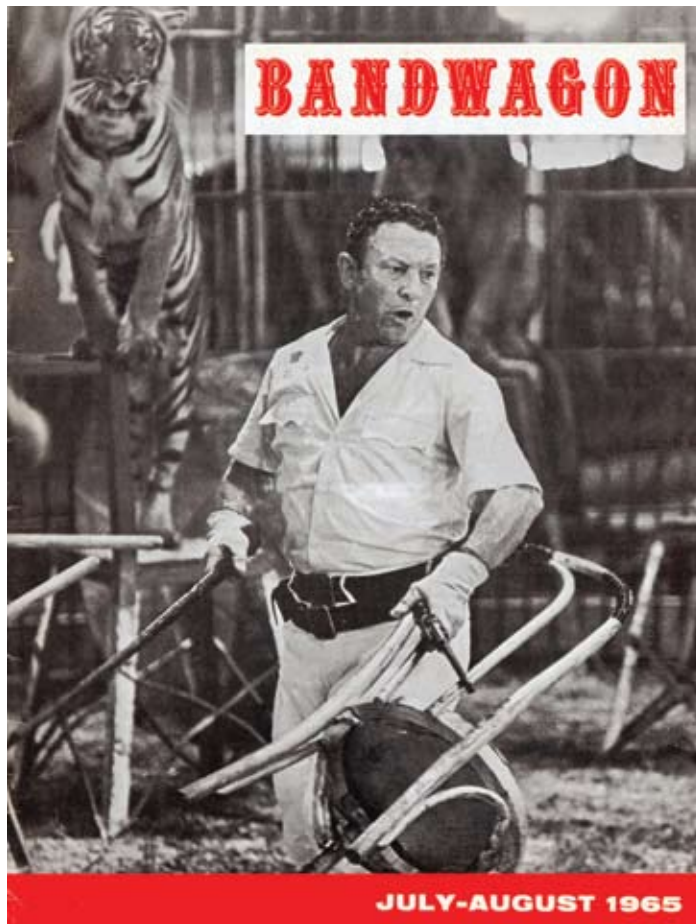
In keeping with a Windy City theme, back-to-back visual essays provide a glimpse of by-gone eras through the enduring creations of two 20th century photographers. Pete Shrake introduces readers to a set of classic images taken by Chicagoan Harry Atwell in the 1920s and 1930s. Color photos, all taken on Chicago circus lots by Charles Cushman, offer a vibrant picture of the Ringling circus in the 1940s and early 1950s.

Two first-time *Bandwagon* authors have also contributed to this issue. Jennifer Cronk, has prepared an insightful article about Billy Livingston’s 1944 costume designs for the Ringling show. Through Jennifer’s work, we are able to compare photographs of the actual costumes to the drawings from which they were created. Dale Williams has provided a short biography of David Blanchfield, outlining his life-long circus career. Dale also recounts how he met the “Deacon” and befriended him late in the veteran trouper’s life.

As you delve into this issue, I ask you to consider the words of the poem that prefaced the Ringling Bros. route book of 1894:

“There are moments in life that are never forgotten,
Which brighten and brighten, as time steals away;
They give a new charm to the happiest lot,
And they shine on the gloom of the loneliest day.”

Those wonderful circus days that we were fortunate enough to have experienced will indeed never be forgotten. And it is our hope that the stories shared in *Bandwagon* will



Clyde Beatty was honored on Bandwagon’s cover after his death in 1965.

enlighten each reader of an earlier time as well.

For me, some of those memories and stories just “brighten and brighten, as time steals away.”

Erratum

In the previous issue of *Bandwagon* (Vol. 63, No. 2, 2019), the photo of the woman on page 45 is not May Kovar, but rather Patricia Walsh. She was one of the showgirls who appeared in Alfred Court’s 1945 act billed as “The Leopard Women.” Walsh, with a leopard draped over her shoulders, was featured the next year on the cover of Ringling’s souvenir program. In addition, the photo of the wild cat on page 98 was incorrectly identified as a lynx. It is a serval. Thanks to Richard Reynolds and Ken Kuwata for noting the errors.



There Used to Be a Circus Here:



The Chicago Lakefront

by Chris Berry

Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey at Chicago's Grant Park, 1925.

Circus World Museum

"She is a novelty; for she is never the Chicago you saw when you passed through the last time."

- Samuel Clemens

Chicago's climate on the "First of May" is just as likely to bring snow flurries as tulips, and even before Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey began its indoor era in 1957, those who lived in the Windy City were accustomed to seeing circuses in buildings. When the Ringling Bros. *World's Greatest Shows* made its Chicago debut in 1895 it spent the entire month of April at Tattersall's Amphitheatre, an immense building that was primarily used for livestock and horse

auctions. In 1900, the Ringling's moved their circus to the Chicago Coliseum on the city's south side, the same building where Barnum & Bailey would open the 1909 season, the only time *The Greatest Show on Earth* had ever started its tour outside of New York.

The Chicago Coliseum was also where later generations turned out for Sells-Floto when Tom Mix was a headliner in the early 1930s, and where Hagenbeck-Wallace Forepaugh-Sells would battle Clyde Beatty and the new Cole Bros. Circus "day and date" in 1935 when the new show gave its first ever performances at the Chicago Stadium across town.

The Chicago Stadium also was home to Ringling Bros.



Above, two years after Ringling-Barnum dropped its big top for the final time, Cristian Bros. Circus made its Chicago debut on the lakefront. It was the first time that a circus other than Ringling had appeared on the lot in 40 years.

Circus World Museum

In 1935, Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey moved its big top from the grassy lawn of Grant Park into the bowl of Soldier Field. It set up there for two seasons before moving to the stadium parking lot.

Chris Berry Collection

RINGLING BROS
and
BARNUM & BAILEY

CIRCUS

UNDER CANVAS IN
SOLDIER FIELD

CHICAGO 9 DAYS TWICE DAILY
BEGINNING AFTERNOON SATURDAY AUG. 3

LAST TIME SUNDAY NIGHT, AUGUST 11

and Barnum & Bailey beginning in 1983 following 24 years as a tenant at the International Amphitheatre, and 33 years before *The Greatest Show on Earth* took its final Chicago bows at the United Center on November 27, 2016.

Although generations associated circuses with those indoor performances, for more than 150 years, and as recently as this past spring, circuses have also raised their tents on Chicago's lakefront, proudly described as "the city's front lawn."

This is the story of those tented shows, and how the American circus evolved on that grassy lot just a stone's throw from Lake Michigan.

In the early 19th century what is now known as Chicago was a humble trading post with a bright future. By the time the city was incorporated in 1837, some 4,000 people already called it home, and in the decade that followed the population grew exponentially. Only ten years after becoming a city, Chicago was a frontier boomtown of nearly 30,000 people. It was no wonder that Rockwell and Co.'s Mammoth Circus included Chicago on its nationwide tour, arriving on October 13, 1847, the first recorded circus to set up in the city.

Very little is known today about Rockwell and Co., yet newspaper accounts from 1847 show the circus starting an ambitious tour in New York that February, making its way to Boston in the spring, and by the middle of the summer giving performances in Ohio. By September the wagon show was in Milwaukee before turning south and re-entering Illinois.¹ After performances in Elgin, St. Charles, Aurora and Naperville, the wagons rumbled into Chicago where a tent was set up and a performance was presented featuring Solomon Lipman, a clown who would refrain from "immodest jokes and double entendre." The audience was assured that it would be able to "listen to his jokes and jibes without a blush."²

Despite the promise that the Rockwell Circus was clean and chaste, in the early 19th century the morality of traveling

shows was questioned by some, including a reader of the *Alton (Illinois) Weekly Telegraph* who scolded anyone who might consider attending Rockwell's show, suggesting that the "200 men and horses would be better occupied cultivating the soil." He closed his letter by asking whether attending the circus "will make anyone a purer or more virtuous woman, or a wiser or better man?"³

While details of that first Chicago circus performance are lost to history, Rockwell & Co. did make national news when it arrived in St. Louis just a few weeks later, and no doubt the letter writer felt some vindication. According to reports carried in newspapers from New York to New Orleans, an equestrian with Rockwell's circus named Hiram Franklin was shot in the face during an argument with a rider identified as "Professor Harrington." Despite his injuries, Franklin survived the attack, but Harrington, apparently fearing reprisal, committed suicide in a dressing tent.⁴

As the public began embracing circuses in the 1850s, most of the well-known shows of that era included Chicago on its itinerary. Whether it was Van Amburgh & Co's Menagerie, Yankee Robinson, Spalding & Rogers, or

Sands, Nathans & Co's, all of them found an abundance of vacant lots in a neighborhood that today is crowded with skyscrapers.

But it was during the summer of 1862, as Generals Robert E. Lee and George McClellan were battling for control of territory near Richmond, Virginia, that Dan Rice began a circus tradition that has continued, off and on, for more than 150 years.

On June 25, 1862, Dan Rice's Great Show became the first known circus to set up on the public space just east of downtown known as Lake Park. Rice was already well known to Chicagoans, having first visited the city in 1858, yet despite his popularity, not everyone in the city government believed that the public park should be used for commercial



In 1862, Dan Rice brought his show to Chicago's Lake Park, the first circus to set up on the showgrounds. Midway through a performance, Rice stopped the show to donate \$500 to a memorial for former Presidential candidate Stephen A. Douglas.

Circus World Museum

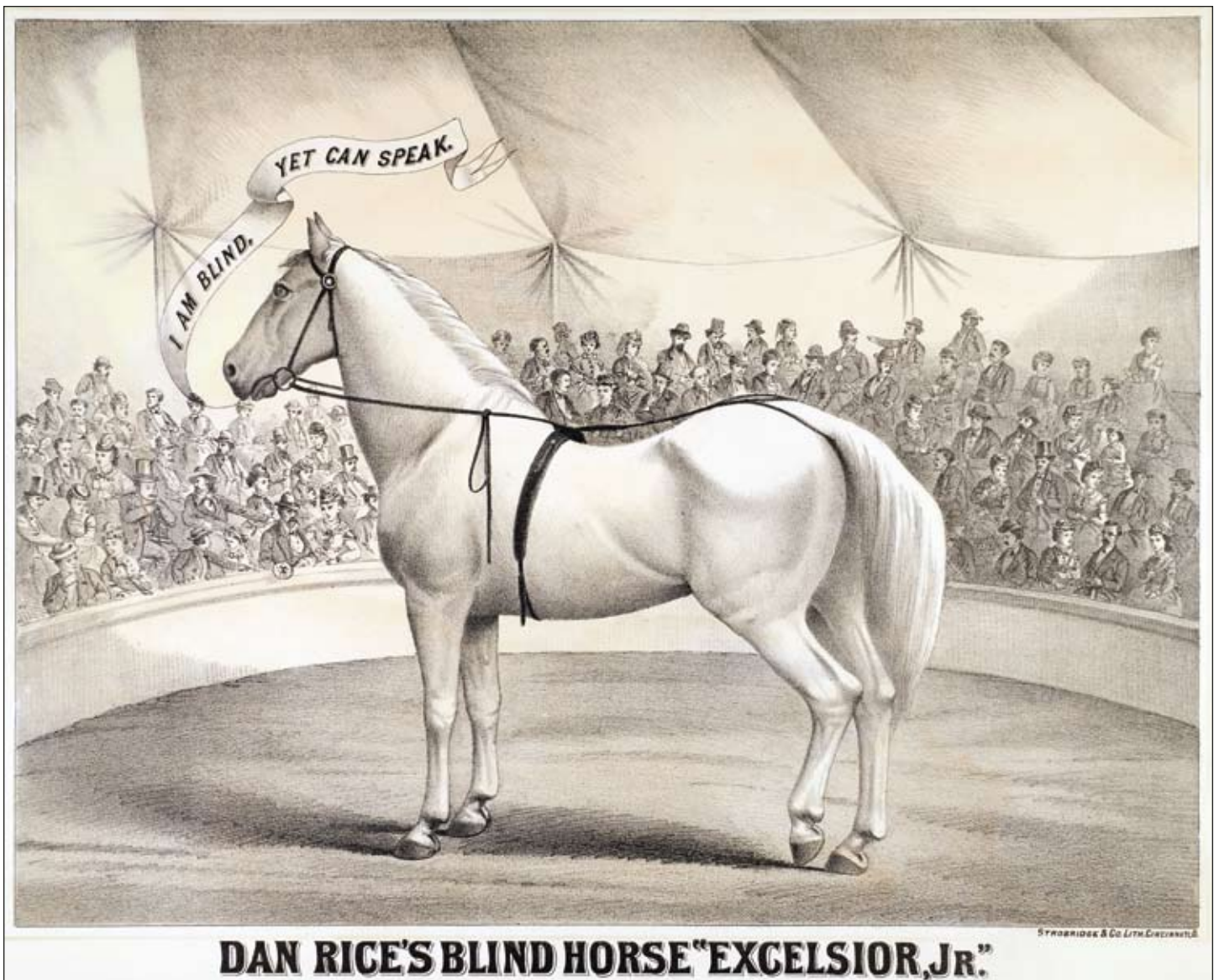
purposes. It was an ongoing battle that circus owners would fight for decades. After a spirited city council debate over the merits of the circus, Mayor Francis Sherman made the final decision and allowed Rice to exhibit on the lakefront.⁵

During the mid-19th century, circus performances often included acts that were considered vulgar by Victorian standards, so to calm any concern about the nature of the show, Dan Rice promised a clean performance, at least at the matinee. In previewing the circus, the *Chicago Tribune* assured its readers that families would be welcome at the afternoon performances, which “are especially for the benefit of ladies and children and will be stripped of every feature which might offend the most fastidious. The clowns will not appear, and the afternoon performance will consist largely of experiments with animals, showing the control Mr. Rice has over the brute creation.”⁶

Although we do not know exactly why Mayor Sherman allowed Dan Rice to set up his circus in the public park, Chicago politicians have a long history of exchanging favors for access, and on June 27, 1862, midway through the three-day stand, Rice stopped the performance to present the city fathers with \$500. The money was then used to help build a monument to Stephen A. Douglas, the United States Senator and presidential candidate who had died the previous year.⁷

As the Civil War slogged on, Dan Rice returned again and again to Chicago, but not to Lake Park. In fact, it was not until 1866 that another circus, Yankee Robinson’s Colossal Moral Exhibition and Nine Shows Consolidated, was given permission to exhibit there for seven days beginning June 11.

The Yankee Robinson circus that rolled into Chicago that day was billed as “Most positively the largest show on



One of Dan Rice’s big attractions in the 1860s was a horse named “Excelsior, Jr.,” who would execute amazing drills, despite being blind. This rare poster from about 1868 is believed to be the first circus lithograph produced by the Strobridge Lithograph Co. of Cincinnati.

The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Circus Collection

the American continent.” Newspaper advertisements trumpeted the fact that the circus, now in its 21st season, carried nearly 400 horses, including an early example of the 40-horse hitch, “the longest team ever driven by one man.”⁸

In reviewing the parade, the *Tribune*, said it “was the largest show ever seen on the streets of Chicago, and an enormous crowd was attracted afternoon and evening to see if it was as good as it was great. The mammoth tent was filled on each occasion and at night at least 3,000 people were turned away.”⁹

Unfortunately, where there are large crowds there are also opportunists, and during the time that Yankee Robinson was set up at the lakefront there was arguably as much excitement outside of the tent as in the ring. Newspaper headlines screamed about a larceny that happened on Friday June 15, when “some unknown fellow made a dash at the Treasurer’s wagon and stole about eight dollars before escaping into the crowd.”¹⁰

Whether it was the success that other circuses were experiencing in Chicago, or the fact that Lee’s surrender at Appomattox made it easier for southern shows to travel north, John Robinson’s Circus and Menagerie made its first trip to Northern Illinois in September of 1866, setting up on the same lakefront lot where Yankee Robinson had appeared three months earlier.

In the 1860s John Robinson was very well known in the Southern United States yet most Chicagoans were not familiar with his troupe. To educate them, advertisements were placed in the city’s newspapers that promoted the circus in polysyllabic prose. The show was described as a “very large company of 120 men and 200 horses, with 50 performers, four clowns, 20 educated ponies, six equestriennes, a variety of choice animals from the Jardine Zoological Paris and distinct corps of voltigenre, acrobats, hippodramatists, pantomimists and equerries.” The advertisement also pointed out that “The company is one of the largest in existence and is said to furnish a first-class entertainment.”¹¹

Suddenly, Lake Park was becoming the preferred showgrounds in Chicago and when Dan Rice returned to the lot in 1867, the reporter who reviewed his circus said that, “The rope-walking and athletic performances were especially good. Dan himself appeared in the ring and electrified the people with his huge practical jokes and his spoken absurdities.” That article closed by stating that “Mr. Rice announced it is his intention to quit the circus after the close of his engagement next Thursday evening.”¹² Yet despite the notice, it wasn’t until four years later, in 1874, that Rice made his final appearance on the Chicago lakefront.

Another circus that made Lake Park its home during the late 1860s was George Bailey’s Menagerie and Circus that made its first appearance there in 1867, and again Chicago’s criminal element took advantage of the large crowds that turned out for both the parade and the performance.

According to the police blotter from April 27, “At about

11 o’clock as a circus procession was passing the Chamber of Commerce, a man named James McGuire took advantage of the pressure of the crowd to rob a lady of a wallet containing \$56. She instantly gave the alarm, and McGuire was seized by the crowd that gathered at the spot and was somewhat roughly treated. About a thousand people were assembled, some of whom cried out for his hanging and others for his drowning.” Cooler heads prevailed, the money was returned to the woman, and Mr. McGuire was taken to jail.¹³

Adam Forepaugh was another showman who viewed Chicago as fertile territory, and he made his first visit to the city in 1869. Although his “Zoological and Equestrian Aggregation” chose a lot on the city’s west side, other companies did set up on the lakefront that year including James L. Thayer’s Great Circus, and once again the rough-and-tumble reputation associated with itinerant showmen made news on the streets of Chicago.

It was during Thayer’s appearance in July that the show’s clown, Nat Austin, was arrested for fighting with a local man who was walking past the showgrounds. Punches were thrown, a brick was dropped on the clown’s head, and eventually the townier was knocked down and beaten senseless. According to the clown, the man, Griffith Thomas, prompted the brawl when he was seen “peeping” into the ladies’ dressing room. The local man denied the charge and police took his word. The clown was fined \$4.00.¹⁴

Chicago and its growing population again beckoned Adam Forepaugh, and when he returned in the spring of 1870, his “Mammoth Menagerie and Gigantic Circus” made its debut on the lakefront, and for the first time his show was viewed in two tents instead of one.

In a front-page story in the *Tribune*, readers were informed that one ticket would provide admission to both tents, and twice during the eight-day stand, “the thirty dens of animals will be fed in full view of the spectators. One of the grandest sights ever seen.”¹⁵

The popularity of Lake Park as a showground was apparent in 1871 as nearly every month that spring and summer a different circus set up on the open space. In late April the Great European Circus was the first to arrive, the street parade featuring “a living lion, mounted on the Globe car, unchained and unfettered, free in the streets, and yet docile as a canary.”¹⁶

Dan Rice followed the Great European Circus onto the lakefront for a two-week stand, with James Robinson’s Great Circus and Champion Show close behind. The New York Circus was next in, and it offered a challenge of \$10,000 that it was the best circus in the world. According to the *Tribune*, any purse won from the wager would be handed over to the Treasurer “of some charitable institution in Chicago, the object of this challenge being to establish a fact and at the same time to aid a worthy charity. Here is the opportunity for boastful pretentiousness to exploit itself.”¹⁷

There is no indication that any of the other shows ac-



The Great Bubalus, or Cow and Horse Antelope from Barbary, and Condoma from the Cape of Good Hope.

These Animals were captured at great risk of life and at vast expense, and are the first and only ones ever brought to this country, and can be seen only in

"ADAM FOREPAUGH'S GIGANTIC AGGREGATION."

When this lithograph was created for Adam Forepaugh's Gigantic Aggregation in 1873, the Philadelphia circus owner had already visited Chicago three times. His first appearance, in 1870, marked the first time a show used both a menagerie and big top on the lakefront grounds.

Chris Berry Collection

cepted the challenge, or that the New York Circus paid off on the bet.

In the months immediately following the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, circuses and other entertainment took a back seat to the tragedy that killed approximately 300 people and left another 100,000 homeless. Just days after the city began its slow recovery the open space on Chicago's lakefront was transformed into temporary homes for refugees and businesses that had been displaced by the flames.

Despite the destruction caused by the fire, Chicagoans were resilient, and soon they were rebuilding the city. Among those intrigued by that spirit were P. T. Barnum, and his partners, and to capitalize on the one-year anniversary of the fire, they brought their circus to Chicago for the first time.

P. T. Barnum's Great Traveling Exposition and World's Fair, combined with Dan Castello's Mammoth Circus, was

presented "in six colossal tents" during a four-day stand from October 7-10, 1872, exactly one year after flames had consumed much of the city.

Unfortunately, because parts of the lakefront were now occupied by those left homeless by the fire, Barnum was forced to set up at the corner of State and 22nd Streets, with the explanation that it was "The only grounds in Chicago large enough for this Colossal Exposition."¹⁸

While circuses continued to visit the city in the years that followed, it was not until 1874 when Buckley's Hippodrome would again bring entertainment to the lakefront. According to the *Tribune*, the show was a sensation, with some 20,000 patrons attending the first two opening performances on July 30.¹⁹ Buckley's Hippodrome was followed onto the lot by Van Amburgh's Great Golden Menagerie for a two-day stand in October, and in May of 1874 Howe's Great London Circus made its first appearance in Chicago,

CIRCUS AND MENAGERIE.
THE STANDARD
EXHIBITION!
OF AMERICA.
THIRD SEASON IN AMERICA.
First Appearance in Chicago Since
Its Arrival from England.



CHICAGO
For 4 Days Only!
OUR CITY OF TENTS!
 AND
EXHIBITION GROUNDS.
Lake Front,
 Foot of Washington-st.,
Wednesday and Thursday, May 12 and 13.
West Side,
 Corner Madison & Elizabeth-sts.,
Friday and Saturday, May 14 and 15.

The Leviathan Coming!
HOWE'S GREAT LONDON CIRCUS,
SANGER'S ENGLISH MENAGERIE of Trained
Animals,
AND IROQUOIS INDIAN TROUPE!
 Largest Combination in America. Special Attractions
 exhibited by no other Company in the World.

OUR FEATURES:
Sanger's English Menagerie
 Composed by all to contain more **TRAINED WILD**
BEASTS, and the most choice and rare collec-
 tion of **LIVING WILD ANIMALS** ever
EXHIBITED IN THE WORLD.
 The only Group of Five Wonderful **PERFORMING**
ELEPHANTS in the World.
 The only Den of Five Ferocious **ROYAL BENGAL**
TIGERS.
 And the only Den of Six **GRAY-ROBBING HYENAS**
 ever captured by man.
 The only Three **BABY ROYAL BENGAL TIGERS**
 ever born while in captivity. Born April 25, 1875.
30 CAGES AND DENS OF ANIMALS.
HOWE'S GREAT LONDON CIRCUS.
 Largest Equestrian Company in America.
 Every Performer a Star.
 Every Feature Produced First-Class.
 Four Shows in the Arena.
 Grand Hippodromatic Spectacles.
 A Glass of Gold and Barbed Steel.
 A Tribe of Real Iroquois Indian Warriors, etc.
 The entertainments of "THE GREAT LONDON"
 are wholly unique.

FROM THE INELEGANCES AND COARSENESS
 too frequently permitted in minor exhibitions, and in this
 institution there is nothing ever presented that a gentle-
 man would hesitate to bring his family to witness, or the
 most exacting can take exception to.

EVERY SPECIAL FEATURE ADVERTISED
THUTFULLY REPRESENTED.
BE SURE TO BE IN THE CROWD.
 The most Gorgeous Street Procession ever seen in the
 streets of Chicago, with its Seven Golden Chariots, im-
 ported from Europe at a cost of \$20,000, together with
 the Grand Roman Hippodrome. Caravans over two miles in
 length, will parade through the principal streets each
 morning of the days of exhibition.

WANT, WATCH, AND SEE IT!
 Admission as usual. 1,200 Reserved Leather-Omb-
 lished Seats. Doors open at 1 and 7 p. m.
 Will also exhibit: May 8, Uxbridge; May 10, Cham-
 paign; May 11, Kankakee; May 12, Geneseo; May 13,
 Rock Island; May 15, Danport.

exhibiting for two days on the lakefront, followed by a two-day stand on the west side of the city.

In its review of the performance, the *Tribune* praised circus management on delivering what had been advertised:

"Public expectation as to the excellence of Howe's great circus had been raised high by the generous advertising done by the management. Great things were promised, and the anticipation of the public were of something unusually good. Had the reality been short of the promise there would have been disappointment, but the bills have not exaggerated the merits of the exhibition. The procession yesterday was one of the most attractive seen in the city for some time and was admired by numbers of our citizens. The chariots are very handsome, indeed. They represent, according to the prevailing fashion, the nations of the earth, or some of them and are gorgeous in gilding. The horses appear to be in good condition, and the whole street parade is bright and fresh. The matinee attendance was large, and surprise and pleasure were expressed at the variety of and excellence of the menagerie."²⁰

Howe's Great London Circus, owned by James Kelley and Henry Barnum, was generating positive reviews in every town that it visited, and P. T. Barnum would need an attraction that would capture the attention of the city when he arrived in Chicago only weeks after Howe's had departed. He had found such a feature the year before in Washington Donaldson.

P. T. Barnum had first learned of Donaldson in October of 1873 when newspapers reported that thousands of spectators had turned out in Brooklyn to watch him launch a balloon which he boasted would carry him to Europe. An hour later, and 6,200 feet over Connecti-

cut, Donaldson encountered a storm. After bouncing around for yet another three hours, the balloon crashed on a farm not far from Barnum's home in Bridgeport.

Impressed with Donaldson's hype, Barnum hired him as an airborne advertisement for the 1874 New York opening of his circus. Each morning the balloon, christened *P. T. Barnum*, would rise above the city and Donaldson would scatter leaflets promoting the show. The scheme was so successful that Barnum continued using it when the circus left New York and began touring under canvas.

The balloon stunt made national news in Cincinnati on October 27, 1874, when Donaldson lifted off with a circus equestrienne, Mary Walsh, her fiancé Charles Colton, and a minister. The couple was pronounced husband and wife as a band played Mendelssohn's wedding march and thousands of paying customers craned their necks to witness the world's first aerial wedding.²¹

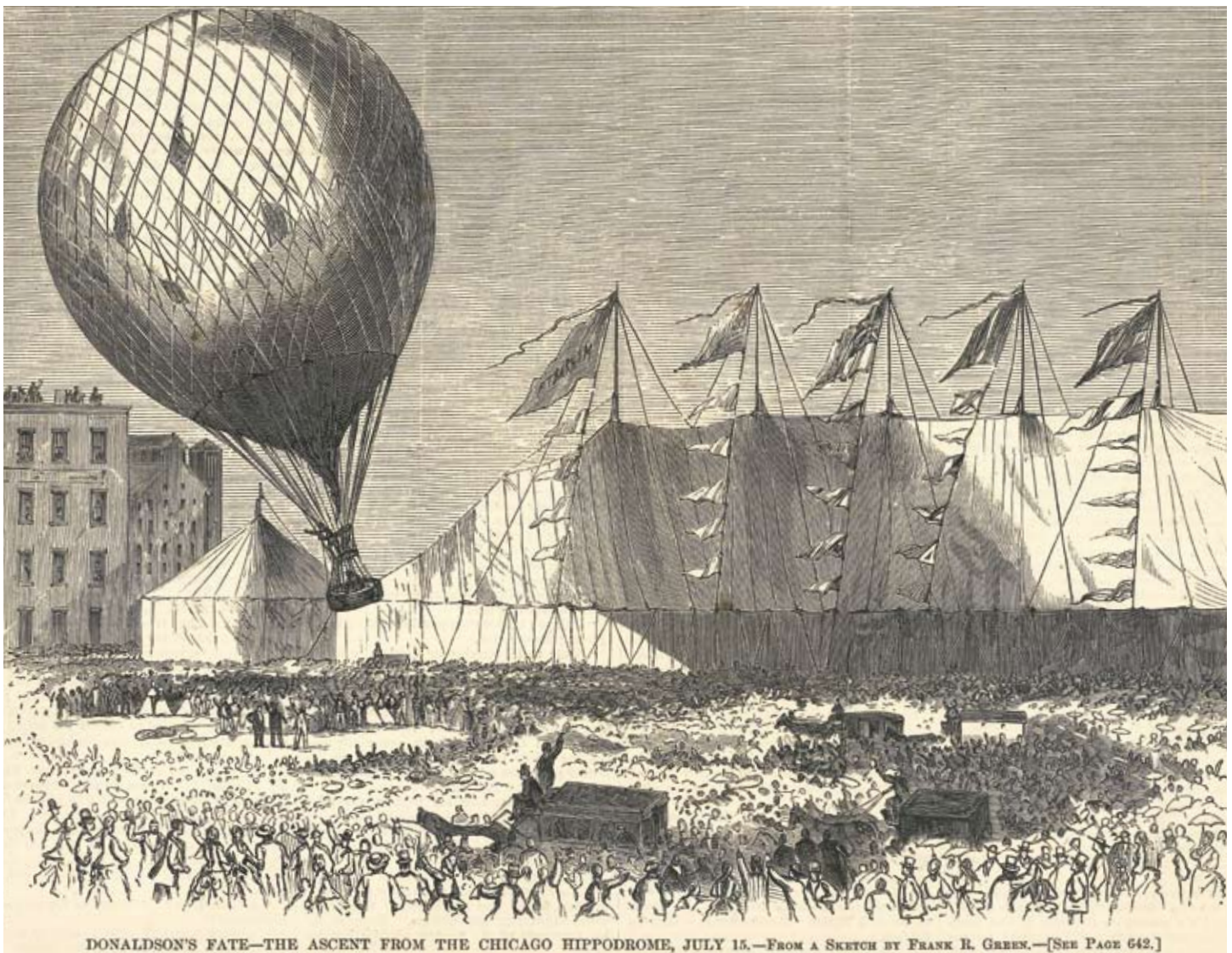
Even before Barnum's circus arrived on Chicago's lakefront on the morning of July 11, 1875, the newspapers were gobbling up the stories that were being cranked out by his publicity machine. "The main tent is 450 feet long and 250 feet wide and will seat 13,000 people," the *Tribune* marveled. "There are a host of smaller ones used for dressing rooms, property rooms, stables and shops where the necessary repairs to wagons and harnesses is carried on. There is also a boarding house where 300 to 400 of the employees take their daily meals. The total extent of territory under canvas is over six acres."²²

The day after Barnum's show premiered on the lakefront the *Inter Ocean* chimed in, and it too was effusive in its praise:

"Strangers are flocking in by the hundreds from the country, and the objective point for them all is Barnum's. Certainly, no circus or menagerie ever to visit Chicago has succeeded in arousing such a degree of public interest, and no show of any kind ever drew such an enormous audience. The first matinee performance was given yesterday afternoon, and the at-

By the mid-1870s, Howe's Great London Circus was making regular appearances on the Chicago lakefront. This newspaper ad dates from May of 1875.

Circus World Museum



P. T. Barnum's promotional balloonist, Washington Harrison Donaldson, left the Chicago lakefront on the afternoon of July 16, 1875, and was never seen again.

Chris Berry Collection

tendance was in the neighborhood of 9,000 people. Last evening the great tent was packed in every part, more so than on the first night, so that there were probably about 15,000 people present. This is doing show business on a big scale with a vengeance.

"The country folks are slow to endorse innovations and in many rural districts, no doubt, the absence of their familiar friend, the clown, and the substitution of live actual racing for the old feats of bareback riding, is still regarded with distrust. These are the days of progress in all things, however, and we may as well make up our minds now as afterward that the palmy days of the 'legitimate' circus are not going to return. Barnum was farsighted enough to perceive that the rising generation was taking but a languid interest in the old sawdust ring and he remodeled it and infused fresh life-blood into it."²³

Despite the innovations observed under the big top, balloonist Washington Donaldson was unable to launch the *P. T. Barnum* on that opening day. The blame was pinned on

the gas company which failed to supply a large enough pipe to inflate the balloon, however the general manager of the circus, William Cameron Coup, had been assured that the airship would go up the next day.²⁴

When it came time to launch the balloon the lakefront was swarming with an enormous crowd, characterized by a reporter as "rowdy and reckless." The correspondent went on to describe the scene:

"At Half-Past Four Six Brawny Canvasmen Filled The Champagne Basket In Which Donaldson Mounts Skyward, And Ten Policemen, Each Smoking A 10-Penny Cigar At The Circus' Expense, Played At Keeping Order.

"In A Delirium Of Pocket-Picking And Foul Language, Two Newspaper Men Passed The Drowsy Line Of Policemen And Scrambled Into The Basket. One Was Newton Grimwood Of The *Chicago Evening Journal*, A Well-Built Young Fellow With A Pale, Stubborn Face, And The Other A reporter from the *Post and Mail*. There was a good deal of

empty noise and clamor about the start. Donaldson delivered at odd intervals, an exposition of the ruder vernacular, and the canvasmen, after the manner of their kind, addressed to and received from the crowd, hearty congratulations in the finest and most rugged Anglo-Saxon.

"At last the awkward sky-climber was ready for its flight. Just then the *Post and Mail* man showed equally the better part of valor. He tumbled neck-over-crop to the edge of the basket, and when ten-feet from the ground, dropped like a scared pigeon."²⁵

"Donaldson was evidently very nervous about the start. He whistled vacantly to himself and took frequent observations of the wind and the promise of the sky. Sunburnt, dusty, and restless, he formed a picturesque contrast to the apathetic canvasmen who kept the balloon to its moorings.

"Just before the balloon began the series of short bumps and jerks which was the prelude to its departure, someone shouted 'Donaldson, you better get out!' The aeronaut was silent for a minute then muttered, 'I wish to Christ I could'"²⁶

According to a meteorologist on the scene, when the balloon left the circus grounds at five o'clock it rose to an altitude of 5,000 feet into a steady wind blowing to the northeast. Moving at 15-miles an hour the balloon was on a course that would have taken it across the lake to Grand Haven, Michigan about 120 miles away where it would land about 1:00 A.M.

Meanwhile a terrible storm was gathering.

That night Barnum's tents were whipped by winds and pounded by a powerful thunderstorm that the newspapers described as "a hurricane." The

next day a group of reporters went to the lakefront where they met with Coup, who expressed his concern about the fate of the balloonist and his passenger.

"I am afraid that poor Donaldson has gone to the bottom," the circus general manager said:

"He was a very good fellow. You can't speak too kindly of him. He was always good humored and a very skillful man at his business. He was very careful, and neither smoked nor drank. Of course, I had to entrust the ballooning to him, just as I entrust our wardrobe to Mrs. Donovan, our press agency to Mr. Thomas and our horses to Dr. Melville."

As Coup was holding his impromptu news conference, Barnum himself entered the ticket wagon:

"With a wink Barnum asked, 'Well sir, what is the latest intelligence from our balloon and Mister Donaldson?' The press agent, [D. S. Thomas] responded with a wink and said 'Nothing definite sir. We have general advices, however that they have arrived safe and sound in Port Huron.'

"Barnum then said to the assembled reporters, 'We have no definite information, but we have received several advices that the balloon and Mister Donaldson arrived safely in Port Huron.'"

The reporters all laughed realizing that the old Humbug was pulling their *Forepaugh's menagerie in 1877 featured a hippopotamus, a rhinoceros, ten lions and "the first elephant born in captivity in the United States." In reality, Topsy had been born in Southeast Asia about 1875 and smuggled into the United States where she remained with the Forepaugh herd for 25 years.*

Circus World Museum

CHICAGO LAKE FRONT. 1877

NOW OPEN



THE GREAT
Forepaugh Show
Every Afternoon and Evening
THIS WEEK,
And no longer—on the park known as the
LAKE FRONT,
Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, & Saturday,
MAY 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19.
THE MOST STUPENDOUS
WILD BEAST SHOW
ON EARTH.
40 TONS OF ELEPHANT FLESH!
And the only living
HIPPOPOTAMUS
The Only
6 Trained Elephants!
AND A WILDERNESS OF WILD ANIMALS
and the
LITTLE BABY ELEPHANT!
The Most
GIGANTIC CIRCUS
Ever Brought to this City.
PARLOR CHAIRS in the GRAND PAVILION
FIFTY FAMOUS PERFORMERS.
Male, Female, and Juvenile, and TRAINED LIONS,
Tigers, Monkeys, Horses, Ponies, Etc.
A MAMMOTH MUSEUM,
All under 8 Centre-Pole Tents.
GRAND DRESS PARADE!
Every Forenoon. A Mile of Gold-Encrusted Tableau
Cars, Herd of Elephants, 2 Great Bands,
Battalions of Men and Horses.
Admitted by all who have seen it to be the most
GIGANTIC AND TREMENDOUS SHOW
The world has ever seen.
Opens at 1 and 7, begins one hour later. Admission
to All, 50 cents; Children under 9 years, 25 cents.
See Papers, Programmes, etc., for details.
PROMENADE CONCERT one hour before the Arenic
Displays begin. Courteous ushers provide seats for
ladies and children.
ADAM FOREPAUGH, Proprietor.
JOHN A. FOREPAUGH, Manager.
R. S. DINGESS, Director General.

leg, as Port Huron is nearly 300 miles from Chicago, and it would have been impossible for the balloon to have traveled such a distance overnight.²⁷

On August 16, more than a month after the ill-fated balloon left the Chicago lakefront, the body of newspaper reporter Newton Grimwood washed ashore on the other side of Lake Michigan. Donaldson was never found, nor was any part of the *P. T. Barnum*.

Despite the loss – or maybe as a result of it – Barnum immediately hired another more seasoned balloonist, Professor Samuel Archer King of Boston, and within days newspaper reporters were again taking rides as part of the circus promotion. Weather continued to dog the stunt however, and only 11 days after Donaldson went missing, storm clouds once again gathered when the circus was in Springfield, Illinois. After launching the balloon, both King and a reporter for the *State Journal* barely escaped with their lives.²⁸

The ascensions were just one of the promotions that Barnum used in his fight against Adam Forepaugh for circus superiority, and throughout the 1870s the battle between the two circus kings was aggressively fought in Chicago. When The Great Forepaugh Show arrived on the lakefront in May of 1877 it boasted of being “Undisputedly the Largest in the World,” with a baby elephant said to be “the first and only one every born in captivity in our country.” Forepaugh also advertised an eight-pole big top, a mile-long parade and equipment that required “three great railroad trains.”²⁹

Barnum took these challenges seriously, and when his *New and Only Greatest Show on Earth* returned to Chicago only six-weeks after Forepaugh had vacated the lakefront, the stand coincided with both Independence Day and the showman’s 67th birthday on July 5. In its review the *Tribune* praised Barnum, as “The Prince of Showmen,” who had assembled “a better and more varied list of attractions than he ever before exhibited under canvas.” The reviewer may have also taken a swipe at Forepaugh when he made special note of the sideshow, which he said was typically “a cloak for sweat-box, thimble-rigging and other swindling operations,” but which on this occasion was “worthy of note.”³⁰

An almost identical scenario played out two years later when Forepaugh was first to visit the lakefront for a week in May of 1879, promoting “40 tons of elephant flesh and at a cost of \$20,000 in gold we have added a living male hippopotamus, the first ever seen alive in this city.”

After seeing the show, a reporter for the *Tribune* acknowledged that Forepaugh delivered on his promises to a population that was clearly enamored with circuses:

“For one thing, if for nothing else, Forepaugh’s circus is entitled to credit, and that is a faithful performance of the brilliant colored promises posted on the fences. Ordinarily the circus poster and the circus performance are two vastly different affairs, but the show that opened yesterday to crowded tents on the lakefront seems to have a hallowed respect for

the prophetic legends with which the management has decorated the dead walls of the city.

“Having inspired confidence in the minds of the general public, it was not perhaps remarkable that the huge pavilion was jammed yesterday and last evening to the utmost capacity. Forepaugh has erected one of the largest tents ever put up for such an entertainment within the limits of Chicago and yet it was scarcely big enough to accommodate the people who applied for admission. By a judicious arrangement of the menagerie, it affords all comers an opportunity ‘to view those wonderful living curiosities from the inhabitable as well as the uninhabitable globe,’ as the side show man would express it. The arena offers the orthodox entertainment in principle, vastly improved upon in degree. The riding tumbling and in fact the whole entertainment is excellent. One of the features of the show is the display of horses and trained elephants. The latter under the care of Mr. Adam Forepaugh have been brought to a high standard of perfection. The ‘Baby Elephant’ over whose sunny curls but few summers have floated is probably one of the most remarkable brutes ever exhibited.”³¹

When Barnum’s show returned for the Independence Day stand in 1877, the crowds were back, despite a drenching cloudburst. As the *Tribune* reported with amazement, “neither hail, nor rain, nor frost, nor thunder has been able to keep the throngs away from the gigantic tents on the lake shore. By day and evening the performances have been attended by the largest audiences that have ever assembled at any show for many years past.”³²

Clearly Chicago was wild about circus performances, and although both Forepaugh and Barnum would return to the lakefront in 1878, one of the more unusual events in the history of the lot occurred when D. W. Stone’s Grand Circus and Musical Brigade set up on the showgrounds in late May. Stone’s circus, which had been launched in New England, was reviewed by a reporter from the *Inter Ocean* who noted that the show “was very well patronized,” and that the performance was “quite attractive.”³³

Yet all was not as it appeared. When a reporter for the *Tribune* went to the showgrounds the next day he was astonished, finding “no tent, no circus, no men and horses, no banners – nothing but a dreary waste of trampled sawdust and tent pole holes.” Evidently the show closed suddenly on May 29 when Den Stone’s brother, who held a \$4,000 mortgage on the circus, stopped the circus in the middle of the performance, loaded up the tent and wagons, and left the performers “without one cent of pay.”³⁴

If Den Stone was unable to make money with his circus, James A. Bailey and James E. Cooper had been tremendously successful with their show following a two-year odyssey that included the United States, Australia, New Zealand and sev-

10 SHOWS IN ONE COMBINED **THE GREAT LONDON CIRCUS** **10 TENTS ONE TICKET CONSOLIDATED**
SANGER'S ROYAL BRITISH MENAGERIE.

AN ARTIFICIAL SUN MAKING NIGHT AS BRIGHT AS DAY. Burning BRILLIANTLY UNDER WATER ILLUMINATING A RADIUS OF 2 MILES GLOWING WITH A PHOSPHORESCENT EFFULGENCE And Still no Heat No Danger from fire or tears of Panic. **OUR VAST PAVILIONS OF 168,000 YARDS & TENTS MADE CONSPICUOUS BY ITS BRILLIANT ILLUMINATION.** **THIS Electric Light IS SO VERY POWERFULL that it causes a flame of GAS to THROW OUT A SHADOW.**

PERFECT AND CLEAR AS MID-DAY SUN-LIGHT

MOST REMARKABLE INVENTION OF THE AGE... STEAM AND THE TELEGRAPH ECLIPSED.

NO MORE DANGER FROM COAL OIL OR NAPHTHA EXPLOSIONS... IN OPERATION DAY AND NIGHT.

BRILLIANT AN THE NOONDAY SUN the intense BRIGHTNESS OF THE ELECTRIC LIGHT is clear cold and Beautiful AND IN NO WAY IRRITATING TO THE WEAKEST EYE IN OPERATION NIGHT & DAY. causing no heat or danger from explosion like Gas or Oil. ALL COLORS EASILY DISTINGUISHABLE. A PURE WHITE LIGHT DISCERNABLE FULLY 2 MILES AND A SIGHT WORTH TRAVELLING 500 MILES TO SEE. **18 ELECTRIC CHANDELIERS EQUAL TO 35,000 GAS JETS, 40 Horse Power Boiler, 30 Horse Power Engine, 900 REVOLUTIONS PER MINUTE, THE FEATURE OF THE AGE.**

THIS ENGINE & BOILER WAS BUILT EXPRESSLY FOR US BY THE FITCHBURG STEAM ENGINE CO. FITCHBURG, MASS.

UNITED WITH THE COOPER, BAILEY & CO. GREAT INTERNATIONAL 10 ALLIED SHOWS.

In 1879, Cooper, Bailey & Co. brought electric lighting to Chicago for the first time, astonishing the population that was accustomed to gas fixtures and candlelight.

The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Circus Collection

eral countries in South America. Although Cooper & Bailey had toured Illinois in the past, the show had never appeared in Chicago and when it arrived on the lakefront it brought an attraction unlike anything ever seen in the city before. For the first time ever the people of Chicago were exposed to electric lights, a scene described by the *Tribune*:

"When the people entered the first menagerie tent it was as light as midday, and a man's shadow reflected on the ground was as clear and clean-cut as if it were done in silhouette...above the head burned what seemed to be two small balls of fire, without any flame or smoke, and of such dazzling brilliancy that the naked eye could hardly stand the glare for an instant.

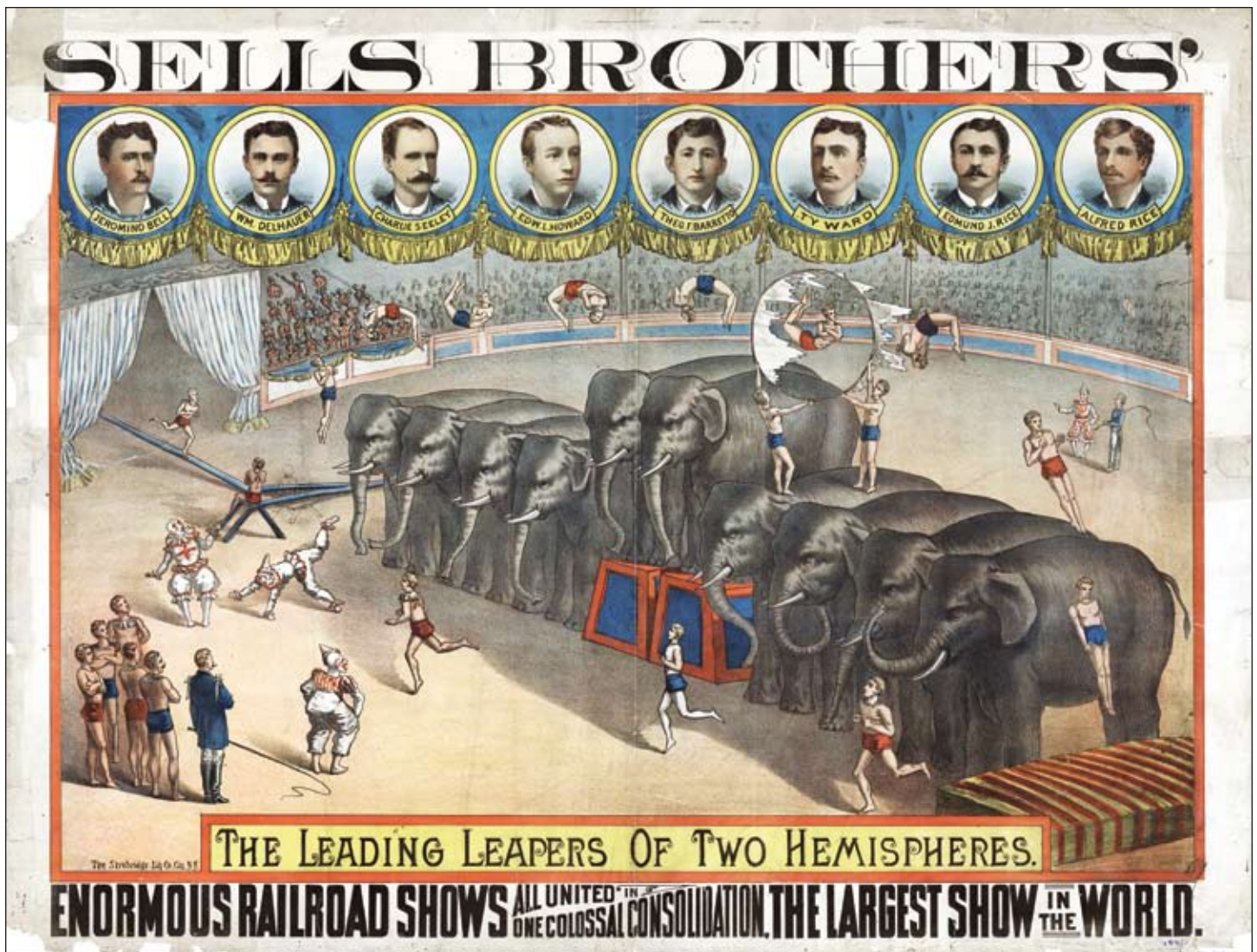
"Passing on to the next menagerie tent the same scene was presented. Here two electric lights produced the same effect as the first tent. The brightness was wonderful. No moonlight ever sent out a tenth part of such brilliancy.

"But the great scene was in the circus tent. Its is

large enough to contain both the menagerie tents. Here were six electric lights. There were also some gas lights. The gas must have been there for the sake of the contrast. The difference was remarkable. Every nook and corner of the immense tent was as bright as day."³⁵

The 1880s brought another newcomer to the lakefront as W. C. Coup's New Monster Shows made its first appearance on the lot, and again despite inclement weather, big crowds turned out for the first circus of the decade. Relentless rains greeted the circus as "horses and men sank ankle deep and the wagons hub deep in the mud," still the average attendance for each performance was estimated at about 7,000, and the show was said to be "was one of the most select and entertaining ever in the city."³⁶

Only two weeks after Coup vacated the showgrounds, P. T. Barnum's *Greatest Show on Earth* rolled onto the lakefront with a circus that Barnum claimed was, "the most costly, the best, and most attractive exhibition I have ever put before the public."



As circuses began carrying large numbers of elephants, the “leaps” became a featured attraction. When Sells Bros. set up on the Chicago lakefront in 1882 it featured eight acrobats billed as “The Leading Leapers of Two Hemispheres.”

Circus World Museum

If that was truly the case, Barnum may have been able to recoup some of his expense through the sale of his new book, *The Life of Barnum Up to 1880*, which was available “on the grounds and in the tent.” The price was 50-cents for a cloth-bound edition, 25-cents for the paperback. Barnum’s book *Lion Jack* was also among the souvenirs that could be purchased at the show for 75-cents.³⁷

In its review of the circus, the *Tribune* focused on “the peerless and fearless Zazel,” and the fact that “Barnum, with his usual skill, has managed to work up some curiosity as to whether Zazel is a boy or a girl. Let that pass,” the reporter said. “She walks upon a wire suspended some fifty feet in the air, dives headforemost from the top of the pavilion into a net, allows herself to be used as a bullet in a spring-cannon, and appears to be perfectly at ease in her rapid journey from the mouth to the roof of the tent. Zazel is small, plump, young and pretty.”

In conclusion, the reviewer said that “Barnum and humbug have long been associated in the minds of the people

and yet, of late years, he has given the public less claptrap and more sterling value for their money than almost any other showman.”³⁸

In 1881, the Sells Bros. circus made the first of three appearances on the lakefront, and while the show was in Chicago a Cook County deputy sheriff visited owners Ephriam and Allen Sells and informed them that a San Francisco animal dealer named J. R. Mullitt was attaching the circus for non-payment of \$1,267, the balance due for nine sea lions that had been delivered to the show’s winter quarters in Columbus.

According to newspaper reports, the Sells brothers had been anticipating the attachment and their attorneys were on hand when the deputy arrived on the lot. The circus claimed it had been promised nine healthy sea lions, but after they had arrived at the winter quarters several would not eat and six of them had died. The deputy was then given \$1,267 in cash and a bond for double that amount with the promise that they would appear in court and respond to the claim.



In 1881, walls and store windows in Chicago were plastered with lithographs such as this as Sells Bros., Forepaugh and Barnum & London all set up on the Chicago lakefront within a few weeks of each other. Circus World Museum

After signing the bond, the cash was returned to the circus, and the Tribune predicted that the case would be “settled in the courts, and the show will go on.”³⁹

Sells Bros. had another run-in with the law during the Chicago appearance when the treasurer of the circus, John H. Murray, was arrested on charges of shortchanging a customer. The case was quickly dismissed when a judge determined there was no evidence to sustain the complaint.⁴⁰ The circus closed out its appearance on the lakefront with a compliment from the Chicago police department which reported that other than the unsubstantiated shortchanging charge, “during the entire week not a single complaint was entered against any of the circus employees, nor was even a case of pocket-picking or disturbance reported.” The officers said the record was “unparalleled and speaks highly for the Sells Bros. and their exhibition.”⁴¹

Only a week after Sells Bros. vacated the lakefront, Adam Forepaugh returned to the same showgrounds with a show that featured “The \$10,000 Beauty – The Handsomest Woman in the World.” As Forepaugh’s parade was traveling on Washington Street near Clark someone shouted, “The tiger that killed his keeper is out!” The false alarm caused a

panic on the street as the crowd scattered, pushing a woman through a window as others “fainted and rushed into every available corner in the frantic endeavor to get away from some imaginary danger.”⁴² Aside from the excitement during the parade, the only other item of note was a newspaper report that Adam Forepaugh had paid his rental of the lakefront lot in silver, \$970 in quarters, halves and dollars that were presented by the bagful to the Mayor Carter Harrison at City Hall.⁴³

Years later David W. Watt, the former manager of Burr Robbins and later treasurer for Adam Forepaugh reflected on the money that flowed during those days in Chicago:

“Many times Mr. Forepaugh would send me word to close down the wagon a little before eight o’clock with thousands of disappointed people that were turned away at the close of one engagement there. One Saturday night Mr. Forepaugh was counting up the last house and three safes in the ticket wagon were already full of money. I had three bags full of silver dollars laying on the floor of the ticket wagon, and I told Mr. Forepaugh to let me put them

BARNUM

LAUGHS

And declines getting out of bed at the Palmer House to see the baby blaze.

"Let her burn; we have a duplicate tent."

And the veteran showman, who has lost \$3,000,000 in first-class Jumbo Conflagrations, rolls over and goes to sleep over a little \$30,000 flame that is amusing the small boys.

Barnum, Bailey & Hutchinson in the role of Chicago builders.

The vast Amphitheatre rises as if by magic on the Lake Front.

Another Immense Audience last night, when Fifteen Thousand people witnessed every act of the great Hippodrome and Circus, every Animal in the Mammoth Menagerie, every Curiosity in the vast Museum, and left at 10 o'clock, wondering what Mr. Barnum and his managers will do next.

The Wardrobe intact. The Gorgeous Costumes shine with undimmed splendor.

And Jumbo will continue furnishing free rides to his myriad admirers.

AFTERNOON AND EVENING.

in the New York Exchange when I got to South Bend on Monday, and that I did not care what the cost would be as I could not take the chance of leaving the silver laying in bags on the floor. The old man looked over his glasses at me and said: 'Dave, you are the biggest fool I ever had around me. You are always worrying over what you got. That don't worry me for a second. It is the money that I cannot get that worries me. I think the money is as safe here in the wagon as it would be in the New York Exchange or some balloon bank that might go into the air so quickly that you would not know which way it went.'

"In those days it made but little difference whether we showed on the lakefront or on State and 22nd Street. Chicago always gave the Adam Forepaugh show a warm welcome and we usually left there with many thousands of dollars to the good."⁴⁴

When P. T. Barnum returned to Lake Park in 1881, his *Greatest Show on Earth* had recently combined with Howe's Great London Circus and Sanger's Royal British Menagerie, and Barnum was now in partnership with James A. Bailey and James L. Hutchinson. Although Jumbo joined the show the following season, the circus did not make it back to Chicago until 1883, and when it did arrive Barnum and Jumbo were welcomed as old friends.

"Of course Jumbo was the center of attraction for admiring crowds," the *Tribune* reported, "and he was liberally doused with peanuts, lemonade and popcorn, all of which he disposed of with evident relish."

The reporter who reviewed the performance had the privilege of watching the performance while sitting next to Barnum, and he described the experience for his readers:

When The Greatest Show on Earth was on the Chicago lakefront in 1883, P. T. Barnum was awakened from sleep in his room at the nearby Palmer House and told that his big top was on fire. After learning that Jumbo and the other animals were safe, he reportedly said, "Let her burn..." and went back to sleep.

Circus World Museum

"During the circus performance P. T. Barnum made his little bow. The old gentleman is still hale and hearty after his 48 years in show business, and he takes as much delight in witnessing the performances as a child would. He is justifiably proud of the show he has on the road this season and is never tired of pointing out its novelties."⁴⁵

Even though Barnum was warmly welcomed to Chicago, he did not sleep well that night, awakened in his room at the Palmer House at about 2:30 A.M., Barnum was told that a disaster was unfolding on the lakefront. His big top was on fire.

According to the *Tribune*, upon waking, Barnum first asked about Jumbo and the other animals, and when he was assured that they were safe he said, "Let it burn. I'm used to it," a reference to the fires that had twice destroyed his New York museums, along with his Bridgeport mansion, Iranistan.⁴⁶

Meanwhile, the fire bells had awakened the city and an enormous crowd was gathering at the lakefront. Circus manager Frank Hyatt was on the scene within ten minutes of the alarm being sounded, and he focused his attention on the menagerie which had been set up inside the White Stockings baseball park adjacent the big top. Once Hyatt determined that the animals were secure, he was able to direct the canvasmen to save the sidewalls along with many of the tent poles and much of the rope that was used to rig the tent.

Although some on scene believed that a passing locomotive had dropped a spark on the canvas, the superintendent of the rail yards, which was located behind the big top, said that there hadn't been an engine within 600 feet of the tents for hours. While the cause was never conclusively determined, investigators said later that the fire may have been caused by a kerosene lamp exploding near the

reserved seats.⁴⁷

Fortunately, the circus was traveling with a spare big top that season, and after evaluating the actual damage, management determined that by replacing seats that had been lost with local lumber, only one performance, the matinee, would be missed.

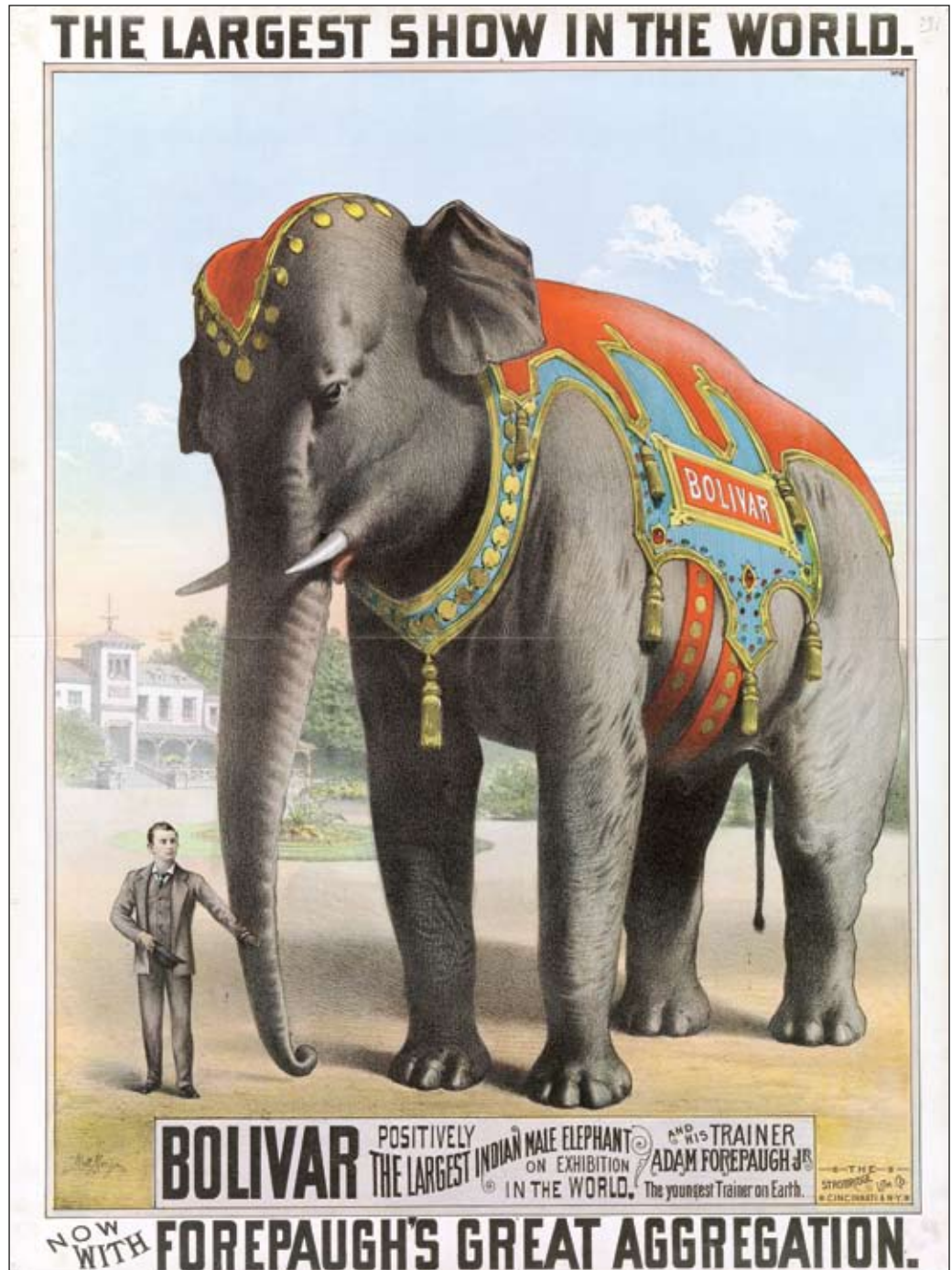
The circus fire was big news the next morning, and when word spread throughout the city that a performance would be given less than 24 hours after the flames had been doused, a crowd estimated at 13,000 packed the tent. As Barnum entered the big top with his granddaughter on his arm he was given a standing ovation, and when he addressed the crowd he joked that he had changed his name to "Phoenix T. Barnum," a reference to the mythological bird that obtains new life by rising from the ashes of its predecessor.⁴⁸

Barnum returned to the lakefront the following September for a week's engagement, and according to the 1884 Route Book, it was during that Chicago run that most of the company had their contracts renewed for the following season.

The Route Book of 1884 also made note of what was described as the largest billing stand ever posted by a Barnum advance team. The display, at the corner of Washington and Clark Streets in the heart of the central business district, was described as being 200 feet long by 50 feet high, requiring 1,410 sheets of paper and 24 barrels of paste. The job was "so dangerous that out of all of the bill posters in Chicago not one could be found with the courage to undertake the job." The lithographs were pasted to the wall by five members of the circus' own advertising brigade.⁴⁹

In 1885, Forepaugh was back on the lakefront, opening his show June 1 on what was described as "the loveliest of summer days." Forepaugh was never one to take a backseat to Barnum, and with Jumbo getting

tremendous press nationwide, elephants were a big attraction for circuses in the mid-1880s. Forepaugh responded to Jumbo, an African elephant, by promoting Bolivar, which he claimed was the largest Asian elephant in America. But it was not just the big elephants that were getting ink. The 1885 Forepaugh circus also featured "the clever antics of little John L. Sullivan, the pugilistic baby elephant," who had been named after the heavyweight boxing champion of the era.⁵⁰



The success that P. T. Barnum had with Jumbo forced Adam Forepaugh to counter with Bolivar, the largest Asian elephant in the United States. This Strobridge lithograph from 1882 is one of a handful signed by artist Matt Morgan, a well-known illustrator of the time.

Cincinnati Art Museum

As the decade came to a close, the future of the lakefront as a home for circuses was suddenly in jeopardy. A prosperous Chicago retailer named Montgomery Ward had become an outspoken critic of the commercial development of the lakefront, believing that the city's early land grants promised that the lakefront acreage should remain public ground, vacant of buildings.⁵¹ Many of the temporary structures that had sprung up after the Chicago fire had now been in place for years, and as they were removed additional shoreline was being created by landfill. With a battle brewing over how to best use the lakefront, it became more difficult for circuses to obtain the necessary permits to set up at the public park, with most shows finding lots elsewhere in the city.

Nevertheless, when Barnum & Bailey arrived in Chicago in 1890 it was able to lease the lot at Lake Park for an extended stay that included performances over the Independence Day weekend. According to the Route Book from that year, during the 15 days the circus spent in Chicago many with the show used the time as a welcome break from the one-day stands by "enjoying the cool waters of Lake Michigan and visiting the city parks."

Both P. T. Barnum and James A. Bailey were in Chicago when the circus opened on the lakefront that year, and prior to Independence Day both of them departed for the east. Shortly after they left "members of *The Greatest Show on Earth* united to celebrate the anniversary of American Independence and the birth of James A. Bailey." The next day the staff sent "congratulatory telegrams to P. T. Barnum, still hale and hearty on his 80th birthday."⁵²

While thousands of Chicagoans used the Fourth of July as an opportunity to celebrate on the lakefront and visit the circus, Montgomery Ward was stepping up his campaign to protect the park, and the following April he obtained a court order that would specifically forbid both Forepaugh and Barnum from using the lot in 1891.⁵³

The mail-order magnate began his environmental crusade in the late 1880s, shortly after he moved into a new office building on Michigan Avenue. As Ward looked out of his window, he would see the shanty town that had been built on the public space and vowed a legal battle to preserve the Lakefront as unspoiled parkland.⁵⁴

Ward may have believed that traveling circuses were an easy target in his campaign, and in early 1891 he was granted a court order that specifically prohibited both the Adam Forepaugh Shows and Barnum & Bailey from exhibiting on the lakefront. As soon as the injunction was issued, attorneys for both circuses petitioned the courts to modify the order.

Adam Forepaugh had died the previous year and his show was now owned by James E. Cooper. As the legal wrangling dragged on, Cooper sent a telegram to his press agent Hugh Coyle who was in Chicago:

HUGH COYLE, AGENT FOREPAUGH SHOWS,
LELAND, HOTEL

MAKE EVERY LEGITIMATE EFFORT TO
OBTAIN THE LAKEFRONT, OUR OLD SHOW-
GROUNDS IN CHICAGO. IN THE EVENT OF
OUR NOT BEING ABLE TO SECURE THOSE
GROUNDS, DO NOT THINK WE CAN JUS-
TIFY PLAYING CHICAGO. AS YOU ARE
AWARE OUR DAILY EXPENSE IS FIFTY-FIVE
HUNDRED DOLLARS, NO OTHER CHICAGO
LOCATION CAN TAKE EXPENSES. PRINCIPAL
OBJECTIONS TO OTHER GROUNDS, DIS-
TANCE FROM BUSINESS CENTER AND LACK
OF TRANSPORTATION FACILITIES.

JAMES E. COOPER⁵⁵

After Coyle received the telegram he visited every newspaper editor in the city, convincing all 12 of them to sign a petition supporting the circus. According to the Adam Forepaugh Route Book, the newspapers embraced the story with editorials and other coverage that was "worth \$100,000" in free publicity, not only in Chicago but nationwide.

Shortly after the petition was presented to Superior Court Judge Kirk Hawes, the injunction was dissolved and both Forepaugh and Barnum & Bailey were given approval to exhibit on the lakefront in 1891.⁵⁶

When Barnum & Bailey tried to return to Lake Park in 1892 it was once again shut out, but this time it was not because of a court order, but rather an event that some would describe as a different kind of circus. The Barnum show was forced to set up at two separate locations in the city that summer because at the same time that the circus was in town, the Democrats were holding their national convention on the lakefront showgrounds in a temporary canvas tent known as "The Wigwam."⁵⁷ On June 20, the same day that Barnum & Bailey arrived for its annual visit to Chicago, delegates from across the nation began their convention that would nominate former President Grover Cleveland as the party's candidate. Cleveland would go on to win the election that year, the only time that a former President would regain the White House.

Barnum & Bailey did not return to Chicago in 1893, but there were plenty of other entertainment options for both residents and tourists that year, most notably the World's Columbian Exposition, a massive fair that was created to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' arrival in the new world.

Planning for the world's fair had been underway for several years, and William F. Cody had hoped to set up his wild west pavilion at the Lake Park showgrounds under the belief that, as a stand-alone attraction, he would not have to share his box office with the fair organizers. Cody's plan was torpedoed however by Montgomery Ward during a meeting of

BALTIMORE, MARYLAND, APRIL 26, 1891



Adam Forepaugh Shows and its spec "1776," appeared on the Chicago lakefront at the same time as the 1893 World's Fair. It would be 25 years before another circus would set up in Grant Park.

Chris Berry Collection

the Michigan Avenue property association in late January. Although the city fathers had supported the idea of Buf-

did secure a license to use the lakefront for one week in June. The competition from the World's Fair proved to be a chal-

falo Bill's Wild West making its home at the park that summer, the property owners whose buildings faced the park, were dead set against it.⁵⁸ The license was denied, and Cody was forced to lease a lot on the city's southside only a short distance from the fair's midway. The move was fortuitous for Cody as he was able to reap the benefit of the 27,000,000 who attended the exposition.

From April 26 to October 31, 1893, longer than the fair itself ran, Buffalo Bill performed to packed grandstands. Despite the marvels on display at the exposition, if a visitor wanted to tell the folks back home that they had attended the World's Fair, they also had to see Colonel Cody and the Wild West.

Another attraction that had tremendous success because of the huge World's Fair crowds in the summer of 1893 was Carl Hagenbeck's Trained Animals exhibition. The wild animal show on the Midway Plaisance included everything from jungle cats and elephants to pigs and polar bears,⁵⁹ and the success that Hagenbeck had at the Columbian Exposition laid the foundation for what would later become the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus.

Although the City of Chicago had denied Buffalo Bill permission to exhibit at Lake Park that summer, Adam Forepaugh Shows, now owned by James A. Bailey and his brother-in-law, Joseph T. McCaddon,

lenge at the ticket wagon however, and business was inconsistent.⁶⁰ Among the schemes used to bring people to the showgrounds was a stunt where celebrity evangelist Dwight Moody preached in the Forepaugh big top for two consecutive Sundays, the first time the Forepaugh circus tent had ever been used for religious services.⁶¹

After Forepaugh left the lakefront in 1893, Montgomery Ward continued his fight to protect the park and as a result, it would be 25 years before another circus was granted a license to exhibit there. Legal battles continued over the future of the park that was renamed for President Ulysses S. Grant in 1901, and a year later the U. S. Supreme Court agreed to hear Ward's case. Finally, in 1902 after years of appeals, the Supreme Court Justices ruled in favor of Ward, prohibiting any structures on the lakefront other than The Art Institute of Chicago and the Illinois Central railroad tracks that had been on the site for decades.⁶²

If Montgomery Ward finally believed that he had succeeded in protecting the public land, his efforts were upset the following year when another local merchant, department store owner Marshall Field, offered to build a \$10 million museum on the lakefront, but only under the condition that Grant Park would be managed by the South Park Commission, a civic group that was responsible for maintaining all of the public land south of the Chicago River.⁶³

The generous gift was accepted under Field's terms, which again opened the park to civic events and temporary structures. Although many shows would continue to visit Chicago in the early 20th century, it would take 15 more

years, and the death of Montgomery Ward, before a circus would again appear on the Chicago lakefront, and then it was only because of unusual circumstances.

On September 20, 1918, a quarter-of-a-century after Forepaugh had vacated the lakefront, the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus set up its tents at Grant Park, less than three months after 83 members of the troupe had been killed in a train wreck near Hammond, Indiana.

Whether it was sympathy for the wounded circus, or the fact that proceeds from ticket sales would be used to benefit soldiers and sailors during the waning days of World War I, Hagenbeck-Wallace owner Ed Ballard was given permission by the South Park Commission to use Grant Park for 17 days of benefit performances, presented under the auspices of the Stage Women's War Relief, a group of actors who were raising money for the war effort.

Ballard invited merchants and groups such as the Knights of Columbus to promote the circus to their followers, and while thousands did flock to the lakefront,⁶⁴ the show was forced to close after only nine days, moving immediately to winter quarters in West Baden, Indiana where it filed for bankruptcy.⁶⁵

With the South Park Commission now on the record that the lakefront was once again a viable showgrounds, agents for Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey began working on a deal that would allow the newly combined "Super Circus" to setup at Grant Park. It would be the first time ever for the Ringling show to play Chicago under canvas, as it had traditionally begun its season indoors at either the



The newly combined Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey spent nine days on the Chicago lakefront in 1919, starting a tradition that would last for 36 years. Some of the profits from that first exhibition of the combined shows was used to build Soldier Field, where the circus would setup from 1935 until 1955.

Circus World Museum



"Never did the big show appear of such massive proportions as on this visit. Never did it seem so complete in detail, and maybe never did its colossal proportions function with such smoothness." The Billboard, July 29, 1922.

Circus World Museum

Chicago Coliseum or Tattersall's.

In 1919, the newly combined show had opened its season at New York's Madison Square Garden, and although the Chicago Coliseum had sufficient seating for an indoor performance, it was definitely not large enough to accommodate the newly combined circus that was turning away customers from a tent that had nearly double the capacity.

Because some in City government still questioned the idea of a private enterprise using the public park to generate revenue, the show was able to make a deal after it promised to contribute 10% of all of the tickets sold during the Grant Park performances to help fund a memorial for the city's soldiers and sailors with a guaranteed donation of \$10,000.⁶⁶

The potential audience under canvas made it an easy decision for the Ringlings, and the circus played to capacity throughout the Grant Park engagement.⁶⁷ A year-to-year comparison of Chicago ticket receipts reveals that during the 16-days that the circus was at the Coliseum in 1918 it generated \$131,801. One year later, with nine days of performances at the lakefront, the show generated \$180,567, a 37% increase in revenue for an engagement that was seven days shorter than the 1918 indoor date.⁶⁸

Incidentally, the show made good on its promise to contribute to the Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Fund, donating \$17,000 to help create the memorial which is known today as Soldier Field Stadium, home of the Chicago Bears, and ironically the venue where Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey would set up its tents from 1935 until 1955.

With the seal now broken, Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey became a regular on the Chicago lakefront for the next 35 years, but not without competition. When the show arrived in 1920 it faced "day-and-date" opposition from a circus made up of World War I army veterans who were raising money to build a memorial at Arlington National

Cemetery. The First Division Circus was set up at the White City amusement park on the city's south side at the same time Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey was on the lakefront. According to *Variety*, some 50,000 patrons crowded into the doughboy's tent during the first five days that Ringling-Barnum was at Grant Park, yet despite the tremendous business, it had no effect on attendance at *The Greatest Show on Earth*.⁶⁹

With Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey now the dominant circus in America, no other show attempted to lease the Grant Park lot. Ringling-Barnum was also the last circus to parade through the loop in 1920, and although the correspondent who reviewed the show for *The Billboard*, was hesitant to estimate the size of the crowd that turned out, he pointed out that while a million-and-a-half people passed through the downtown area each day, "Not that many saw the parade, but most everybody who could get a toe-hold somewhere did see it."⁷⁰

As Ringling-Barnum returned to Chicago each year of the "Roaring 20s," reviewers repeatedly expressed their amazement at how each new edition was superior to the previous season. In 1921, the circus gave 32 performances over 16 days, the longest stand ever under canvas in Chicago. And in 1922, *The Billboard* summed up the sentiment that was shared by those who had watched the circus evolve when it reported, "Never did the big show appear of such massive proportions as on this visit. Never did it seem so complete in detail, and maybe never did its colossal proportions function with such smoothness."⁷¹

Both John and Charles Ringling were usually together on the Grant Park lot during the 1920s, meeting friends and talking to the press. Typical was Charles Ringling's quote to a Chicago reporter when he spoke of the circus's success in those heady days before The Great Depression, "It has been



This action shot of May Wirth performing her ancient art in an outdoor practice ring is juxtaposed against the hotels and office buildings on South Michigan Avenue.

Circus World Museum



Although Chicago's Lincoln Park Zoo was well established by the time that Harry Atwell took this photograph in 1928, most of those in the city had never been exposed to the vast array of exotic animals carried in the menagerie of The Greatest Show on Earth.

Circus World Museum



Lillian Leitzel and Alfredo Codona were photographed on the lakefront shortly after their marriage on July 21, 1928. According to reports, Leitzel kept her groom waiting for three hours, and when she arrived at the church she was escorted by a long-time admirer.

Circus World Museum

the best season in the show's entire history thus far," he said in 1926,⁷² though his comments could have been made at any time during an era where performances featured circus legends such as Mabel Stark, Pallenberg's bears, Ella Bradna, Con Colleano and May Wirth, who "danced the black bottom atop a galloping horse,"⁷³ all to the beat of Merle Evan's big top band.

Perhaps one of the most significant events of the Ringling circus of the 1920s was the love affair that developed between Lillian Leitzel and Alfredo Codona, culminating in their Chicago wedding in 1928. Codona had divorced his wife Clara shortly after Christmas 1927, and with the start of the new season, romance blossomed between the two circus superstars.

By the time the show reached Chicago in July the relationship had developed to the point that one gossip columnist reportedly wrote about the couple in language that could have been dictated by a circus press agent. "The marriage of these two comets in the galaxy of circus would brighten heaven," she wrote. "It will – it must – take place. It is preordained."⁷⁴



Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey is viewed here as it looked on the Grant Park lot in the late 1920s, with the midway and main entrance facing north, the Illinois Central railroad tracks to the right, and the Field Museum of Natural History, completed in 1921 in the distance.

Circus World Museum



This 1929 lithograph captures the art deco styling of the Roaring 20s, rather than the traditional colors and images associated with circus posters of that era.

Circus World Museum

The wedding was scheduled between shows on Saturday, July 21, 1928 at the Fourth Presbyterian Church on Michigan Avenue, a short taxi ride from the lakefront. Many of the performers were invited to the ceremony, with Ella Bradna serving as matron of honor and Alfredo's brother Lalo as best man.

According to Leitzel's brother, Alfred Pelikan, the bride did not arrive at the church until three hours after the ceremony was scheduled to begin, leaving Codona and the guests wondering if she would appear at all. Pelikan also told author Dean Jenson that when Leitzel finally did arrive, she shocked those assembled when she entered the sanctuary accompanied by her longtime admirer, Colonel H. Maxwell

Howard, a wealthy paper mill owner from Dayton, Ohio.⁷⁵

Following the ceremony, the newlyweds were chauffeured back to the lakefront lot by clown Myron "Butch" Baker, at the wheel of the same trick car that he drove during the circus performance, only this time the jalopy carried signs that read "Just Married."

Years later, equestrian director Fred Bradna recalled that Leitzel's late arrival for her wedding ceremony, and the fact that she was accompanied by Colonel Howard, did not set well with Codona. Bradna also said that the bride's wealthy friend had paid for the lavish reception and dinner after the evening performance, and when Leitzel disappeared for several hours that night Codona was furious. According to Bradna, the flyer was so upset that it affected his performance on the trapeze for several days.⁷⁶

One of the big attractions to join the show in 1930 was the "Ubangi Savages." When the show arrived at Grant Park that summer, John Ringling told the *Tribune* the group was "the show's most important drawing card," as evidenced by huge crowds at Grant Park, including two performances that each attracted a capacity audience of 16,000.⁷⁷

Long time press agent Bev Kelley was one of those responsible for promoting the Ubangis in 1930, and he recalled that while the show was in Chicago, the group went on strike, stripping off their clothes on the bus ride from the train to Grant Park. According to Kelley the Ubangis refused to work because they suspected their manager, Eugene Bergonier, of stealing money they had earned from selling postcards in the menagerie tent.⁷⁸

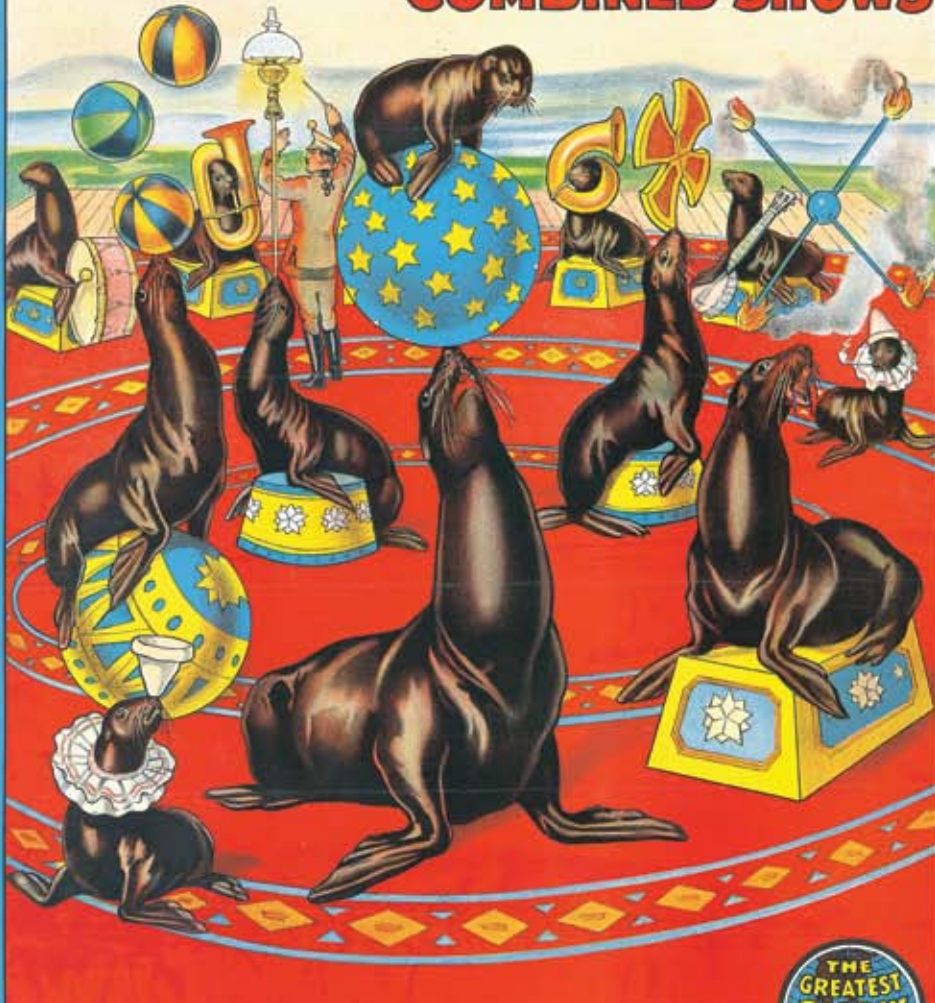
Merle Evans picks up the story from there: "The women took to carrying miniature figures of Dr. Bergonier, and they would torture these in mysterious ways, pinching them, and sticking them with pins." Eventually, things got so bad that Bergonier had to leave the train in fear of his life.⁷⁹

Shortly after the show arrived in Sarasota at the end of the 1930 season, Bergonier became ill, dying of what doctors said was septic pneumonia. According to the *New York Daily News*, when the Ubangis heard of their manager's death they began celebrating, thinking that his demise was the result of the spells they had cast upon him. Because of their excitement, combined with the superstitious nature of many who worked for the show, the circus decided it was best to send that group back to Africa.⁸⁰ After a hiatus of one season, the Ubangis returned to the circus in 1932.

During the dark days of The Great Depression, Chicago newspapers used the summertime arrival of the circus as a metaphor that "happy days were here again," by pointing to the success that Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey was having in Grant Park and tying it to an optimistic feeling of prosperity. The papers gushed about "automobiles parked many deep, hub to hub," and "thousands who jammed and pushed their way into the main entrance."⁸¹

Another attempt to distance the city from the Depression was the two-year Century of Progress World's Fair that

RINGLING BROS AND BARNUM & BAILEY COMBINED SHOWS



SEALS THAT EXHIBIT INTELLIGENCE SCARCELY LESS
THAN HUMAN, IN MARVELOUSLY SKILLFUL PERFORMANCES



RINGLING BROS AND BARNUM & BAILEY COMBINED
GRANT PARK
CHICAGO - 9 DAYS TWICE DAILY
BEGINNING MATINEE SATURDAY
LAST TIME SUNDAY NIGHT, AUG. 16

was held in Chicago in 1933-34 just south of Grant Park on the shores of Lake Michigan.

At the same time Chicago was welcoming visitors to the Century of Progress in 1933, Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey was celebrating its "Golden Jubilee," commemorating 50 years of performances by the Ringling brothers. Even though the circus had become a tradition on the lakefront, no one was sure how it would coexist with the World's Fair.

There had been discussion of setting up the circus inside of Soldier Field so that those attending the fair would only be a short distance from the main entrance of the circus, then when the fair and the circus could not agree on terms there was concern that the show's license would be revoked.

Eventually, the negotiations with the fair fell apart and the show was allowed to set up at its usual location near Buckingham Fountain.⁸² According to *Variety*, city politicians "not too friendly to the expo, evidently saw no reason to deny the big show its regular license."⁸³

The circus did experience a bit of a logistical challenge after setting up in Grant Park that season. In the previous few years, the main entrance to the big top had faced north, toward 7th Street. Immediately after the tents had been set up that summer, the circus managers decided that if the main entrance faced south it would be much closer to those who would be attending the Fair,

Despite the challenges of The Great Depression, when Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey began its nine-day stand in August of 1931, Chicago newspapers reported that the huge crowds at Grant Park were a sign that the economy was improving.

Circus World Museum

While in Chicago in 1930, the Ubangis went on strike, stripping off their clothes and refusing to work. After their manager died at the end of the season, they were sent home to Africa. A second troupe of Ubangis joined the show in 1932 when this poster was produced by well-known, illustrator "Hap" Hadley.

Chris Berry Collection

and maybe attract additional attention.

Even though all of the tents were already in place, a directive was given to turn the lot around so that the marquee faced south, four blocks closer to the fairgrounds. According to *The Billboard*, it only took about two hours to do the job.⁸⁴ Still money for entertainment was hard to come by in the 1930s, and during the nine days that the show



From 1931 through 1934, August Marcellus Watson's "Living Statues" were a featured act with Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey. Photographer Harry Atwell captured the Marcellus Troupe in the early 1930s, posing on Buckingham Fountain, just a short distance from the big top.

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shared space with the World's Fair it only generated a little over \$81,000.

The Century of Progress was a two-year exposition, and because of the lack of business in 1933, circus manager Samuel Gumpertz decided to pass by Chicago in 1934, returning in 1935, but at a new location. Instead of raising its canvas city in Grant Park, the show was given permission to put up its big top on the football field inside of Soldier Field. Thus it was located slightly to the south, but still on the Chicago lakefront.

The circus had been pushing the idea for several years, with the belief that not only was there better parking available, but also that animals could be housed under the



This aerial photograph of Soldier Field shows the enormity of the stadium. In addition to the big top, the stadium could also hold the menagerie, sideshow and other tents in its bowl.

Circus World Museum

stadium avoiding the necessity of putting up tents for the horses and other animals.⁸⁵

The circus set up its big top inside the actual stadium in both 1935 and 1936, after which it moved to the large park-

ing lots adjacent to the football field. With the show in its new location the crowds responded. According to *Variety*, during the nine-days that the show was in Chicago in 1936 it generated \$200,000, about two-and-a-half times the amount

At the time this photo was taken in 1935, Soldier Field was capable of seating over 100,000 people.

Greg Parkinson Collection





If you had visited Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey in Chicago in 1935 this is what you would have seen approaching the midway and big top.

Circus World Museum

earned just three years before during the 1933 World's Fair engagement.⁸⁶

It was not just the location, but also attractions such as Tim McCoy and "pygmy elephants" that attracted big audiences in the late 1930s, as did publicity stunts such as one hatched in 1937 by press agent Frank Braden.

Before the circus arrived in Chicago, Braden planted a story in the papers that the circus was carrying two anteaters in the menagerie that summer, and that they were voracious eaters. All of the city's newspapers carried Braden's appeal to the children of Chicago to help feed the aardvarks, with the promise that anyone who brought a half-pound of ants to the showgrounds would be given free admission.⁸⁷ According to a follow-up story, ten girls and boys came to Soldier Field with tin cans full of ants, a small price to pay to see *The Greatest Show on Earth*.⁸⁸

On the day that the circus arrived in Chicago in 1937, those with the show learned of the murder of aerialist Vera Bruce and the suicide of her husband Alfredo Codona in Los Angeles. In its review of that opening day the *Tribune* recounted Codona's greatness on the flying trapeze and his triple somersault, making note of the fact that during the performances on July 31 Antoinette Concello successfully completed the triple twice.⁸⁹

Chicago was originally on the Ringling route for 1938, however when working men went on strike in Scranton, Pennsylvania on June 22, featured acts from the circus, along with Gargantua and Frank Buck, were transferred to

the Ringling-owned Al. G. Barnes and Sells-Floto circus. Although the newly combined show continued touring until the end of November, the closest it came to Chicago that season was Joliet, some 50 miles away.

Gargantua finally made his first appearance in Chicago in 1939, as did new circus managers John and Henry Ringling North who were reveling in the success of their show. On the last day of the 1939 Soldier Field engagement, Henry North was seen escorting actor John Barrymore on the lot, and as they stood watching the big top come down, Barrymore, ever the poet, told the woman he was with that the scene conjured up memories of "a sailing vessel under a South Pacific moon, with sailors clambering on its masts." Earlier, while in the menagerie, Barrymore met another lady who refused the peanuts he offered her, preferring a sheaf of straw. He looked at the elephant and said, "that is one lady I would not like to have walk over me."⁹⁰

Elephants and performers alike were battling scorching temperatures when the circus came to the Soldier Field parking lot in the summer of 1940, but for the first time audiences were treated to a new air conditioning system that pumped cool air into the big top. Despite positive reviews of the performance, *The Billboard* claimed that blistering temperatures above 100 degrees kept audiences away. As a result, business was off 10 to 20 percent from 1939.⁹¹ As Chicago sweltered in the heat, John Ringling North was on WGN radio to talk about his new air conditioned big top and crow about the success the circus was having under his



By 1941, the big top had moved from inside Soldier Field to the stadium's south parking lot. The show that season featured the influence of designer Norman Bel Geddes who modernized the big top, midway and the performance. Circus World Museum



The 1943 stand at Soldier Field was one of the most successful in years. Among the features was a street parade spec titled "Hold Your Horses." This photograph shows the Liberty Bandwagon as the spec was leaving the tent on the Chicago lakefront.

Circus World Museum

management.⁹²

North's innovations continued in 1941 as Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey was transformed that season by Norman Bel Geddes who brought new concepts to the circus, including the newly designed menagerie which was set up in the parking lot just south of Soldier Field. Another change involved an innovative promotional campaign. Money that had originally been earmarked for 24-sheet commercial billboards in Chicago was redirected to 150 Railway Express trucks that were plastered with circus posters and seen throughout the city while making deliveries. Date sheets were also printed with a new tag line that read, "South of Soldier Field, Lake Front," which management believed would provide a more specific location to those attending the show.⁹³

It was not the location, but other challenges that impacted Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey in September of 1942. While the Chicago stand of 1941 had been considered a box office bonanza for the circus, 1942 was a disaster, off 25% from the previous season. When interviewed shortly before the circus left town, John Ringling North blamed the lack of business on wartime travel restrictions which had routed the show into Chicago a month later than usual which meant chilly weather and a time when children were back in school.⁹⁴

In its analysis of the 1942 stand, *Variety* said there may have been yet another factor at play. The newspaper suspected that many Chicagoans had spent their entertainment money in the days before the circus arrived when Soldier Field hosted an Army War Show which had generated some \$800,000 as a charity fundraiser less than a week before the circus arrived.⁹⁵

If 1942 had been a disaster at the ticket wagon for John Ringling North, his cousin Robert Ringling found success the following season by embracing nostalgia. Newspaper articles promoting the Soldier Field performances of 1943 focused on the six-pole big top, the circus parade spec "Hold Your Horses," and 71-year old equestrian director Fred Bradna. The result was a successful run which included participation in a War Bond drive that generated \$2,335,000.⁹⁶

One year later Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey was still selling war bonds, but when the trains arrived in Chicago in 1944 the circus was also recovering from the worst disaster in its history. Only about six weeks prior to opening at Soldier Field, fire had consumed the big top in Hartford, Connecticut killing 168 people. Although the circus had quickly returned to the road, with no tent the circus was forced to give its performances outdoors in ballparks and stadiums. At the time, Soldier Field was one of the largest stadiums in the world, accommodating 74,000 football fans, and for the 1944 engagement 15,000 seats on the northeast corner of the field were set aside for the circus performance, presented under the open sky.⁹⁷

Opening night in Chicago was once again turned over to



After the Ringling big top was consumed by fire in Hartford, performances resumed in outdoor stadiums such as Soldier Field where 15,000 seats were utilized on the northeast corner of the field. During the Chicago stand, 71-year old Fred Bradna told a reporter that, in the tradition of the entertainment world, "the show must go on."

Circus World Museum

the payroll savings division of the Treasury Department in 1944, and 10,000 tickets were distributed to defense workers who were enrolled in payroll savings plans at factories that were producing products tied to the war effort. The entire audience on the evening of August 22 was made up of workers who were donating a portion of their paycheck to the purchase of War Bonds.⁹⁸

While the show was in Chicago, the *Hartford Courant* sent a reporter to Soldier Field to write about how the circus was recovering from the fire. In addition to reporting on such things as the fireproof sideshow tent and the fact that firemen were stationed throughout the lot, he spoke with several performers about the fire, including equestrian director Fred Bradna who said, "None of us is really over the tragedy in Hartford, but in the tradition of the entertainment world the show must go on, just as it did before."⁹⁹

The show did go on, however another dispute with the



After a contract dispute with the Chicago Park District, the circus returned to Soldier Field in 1946. Sverre Braathen snapped this view a few years later on July 30, 1949.

Illinois State University Milner Library Special Collections



One of those who made a striking appearance on the Chicago lakefront showgrounds in 1950 was Hannelore "Rita" Schroeder. The dressage rider from Germany was contracted by John Ringling North for a featured appearance in the "manage" production number.

Illinois State University Milner Library Special Collections

Chicago Park Board kept it from returning in 1945. The Park Board was asking for a percentage of the ticket sales rather than a flat fee, and with negotiations deadlocked, the date was cancelled only two-and-a-half weeks before the circus was scheduled to arrive on August 3.¹⁰⁰

With the contract dispute resolved, the following year the circus returned to annual engagements at Soldier Field throughout the late 1940s, and when the show arrived in the summer of 1949 one of the guests on the lot was film director Cecil B. DeMille who celebrated his 68th birthday in the cookhouse. While in Chicago, John Ringling North gave DeMille use of his private car, The Jomar, for a three-week tour of the Midwest where the director soaked in the circus and began planning production of the film *The Greatest Show on Earth*.¹⁰¹

DeMille and North became close that summer and when the show returned to Chicago in 1950, tickets used during the Soldier Field engagement not only carried a plug on the back for DeMille's latest film *Samson and Delilah*, but also included an announcement for the upcoming film that informed ticket buyers that they were giving permission to be used in the movie if Paramount was filming that day. Unfortunately, the Chicago stand was the low point in the 1950 season as it coincided with bad weather and the start of the Korean War. Ringling officials believed that crowds stayed away to listen to the latest war news and a national address from President Truman.¹⁰²

After appearing on the lakefront in 1951, the dispute over payments to the Chicago Park District raised its head again, and in both 1952 and 1953 the circus moved to the city's west side, setting up at the corner of Cicero and Roosevelt Road, returning to Soldier Field in 1954 where it showed to



Although the scenes for *The Greatest Show on Earth* had been filmed earlier in the 1951 season, this set-up on Chicago's Soldier Field's south parking lot shows the same tents and equipment pictured in the Academy Award winning movie.

Circus World Museum

capacity houses.

One of those who personally experienced the huge crowds in 1954 was Bill Taggart who worked in the yellow ticket wagon that season. Sixty-five years later he still remembers the hundreds of people lined up to buy tickets for the show at Soldier Field. "We did business on the lake-front in '54. It was good," he said.¹⁰³ An analysis of what *The Billboard* called a "dream run" reported that the show had three turnaway performances during the 1954 stand and a number of near capacity houses.

In its official review of the date, show management said it believed the nine-day Soldier Field stand would top all previous years for revenue, including the big dates during

the 1920s. Officials attributed the explosion in business to several factors including twice the billing that was posted in 1953, along with the use of mail-out heralds, and extensive attention by both newspapers and broadcasters. It also helped that the stand in 1954 came later in the summer than it had been over the past several years.¹⁰

If the Chicago date of 1954 was a "dream," then 1955 was a "nightmare." Most performances were played to less than a third of a house with an average audience of only about 1,800. Lack of adequate advertising was widely blamed for the losing run, with some on the show noting that the public "doesn't know we are here."¹⁰⁵

When the 1956 season started Ringling Bros. and



By the time this photograph of Emma Castro, Pinito del Oro and her husband Juan de la Fuente was taken on the Chicago lot in 1951, all of the major scenes had been shot for The Greatest Show on Earth. Although Pinito del Oro was a featured attraction with the circus, she did not appear in the film because of a contract dispute with the producers.

Circus World Museum



Chicago newspapers marveled at Art Concello's new seat wagons, which "take 50 men only an hour to set up." This Jeep is viewed during the set up at the Soldier Field lot on August 28, 1954 as it winched up the sides of one of the Concello designed wagons.

Circus World Museum



Both Cecil B. DeMille and playwright Ben Hecht were on the Soldier Field lot in 1949, two years before filming got underway for the The Greatest Show on Earth. Beginning in Chicago, DeMille toured with the circus to get a feeling of what life under canvas was like.

Circus World Museum

Barnum & Bailey was contracted to be at Soldier Field for ten days beginning on August 25 and closing on Labor Day, however the circus never made it to Chicago, closing in Pittsburgh on July 16 after weeks of labor and transportation problems. Like many newspapers, the *Chicago Tribune* editorialized about John Ringling North's decision to close the circus. In his editorial, Walter Trohan reflected on the history of the circus as he remembered it and lamented the fact that the biggest of them all would never return to Chicago under canvas. "With the death of the circus, part of our youth has died for many of us," he wrote.¹⁰⁶

While there were many obituaries for the circus in the summer of 1956, Tom Parkinson, who at the time was circus editor of *The Billboard*, reminded readers in the same edition of the *Tribune* that the circus "was a long way from dead," and many of the 35 circuses that were still on the road were "larger than what were considered huge circuses in the 19th century."¹⁰⁷

Among the shows that were growing was the Cristiani Bros. Circus which had been expanding throughout the 1950s, eventually reaching the status where it too could occupy the Chicago lakefront where so many other circuses had set up in years past. Less than two years after Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey dropped its big top for the last time, Cristiani's tents were set up at the same spot where *The Greatest Show on Earth* had exhibited for so many sea-



The Cristiani Bros Circus that set up at Soldier Field in 1958 featured the Tony Diano collection of animals, which returned to the show after an absence during the 1957 season.

Circus World Museum

sons. It was the first time that a circus other than Ringling had played the Chicago lakefront since 1918, and Parkinson was on hand to review the show for *The Billboard*.

“On the lot, the show is large, and the spread of canvas is expansive, with a three-pole sideshow, five-pole menagerie and a good-looking canvas bannerline,” he wrote. “In Chicago this show filled the lot well and looked as substantial as did the R-B show when it spread its Big Top and Side Show on the same lot.” Parkinson went on to describe the acts on the show, calling the show “a first-class performance that is all circus....”¹⁰⁸



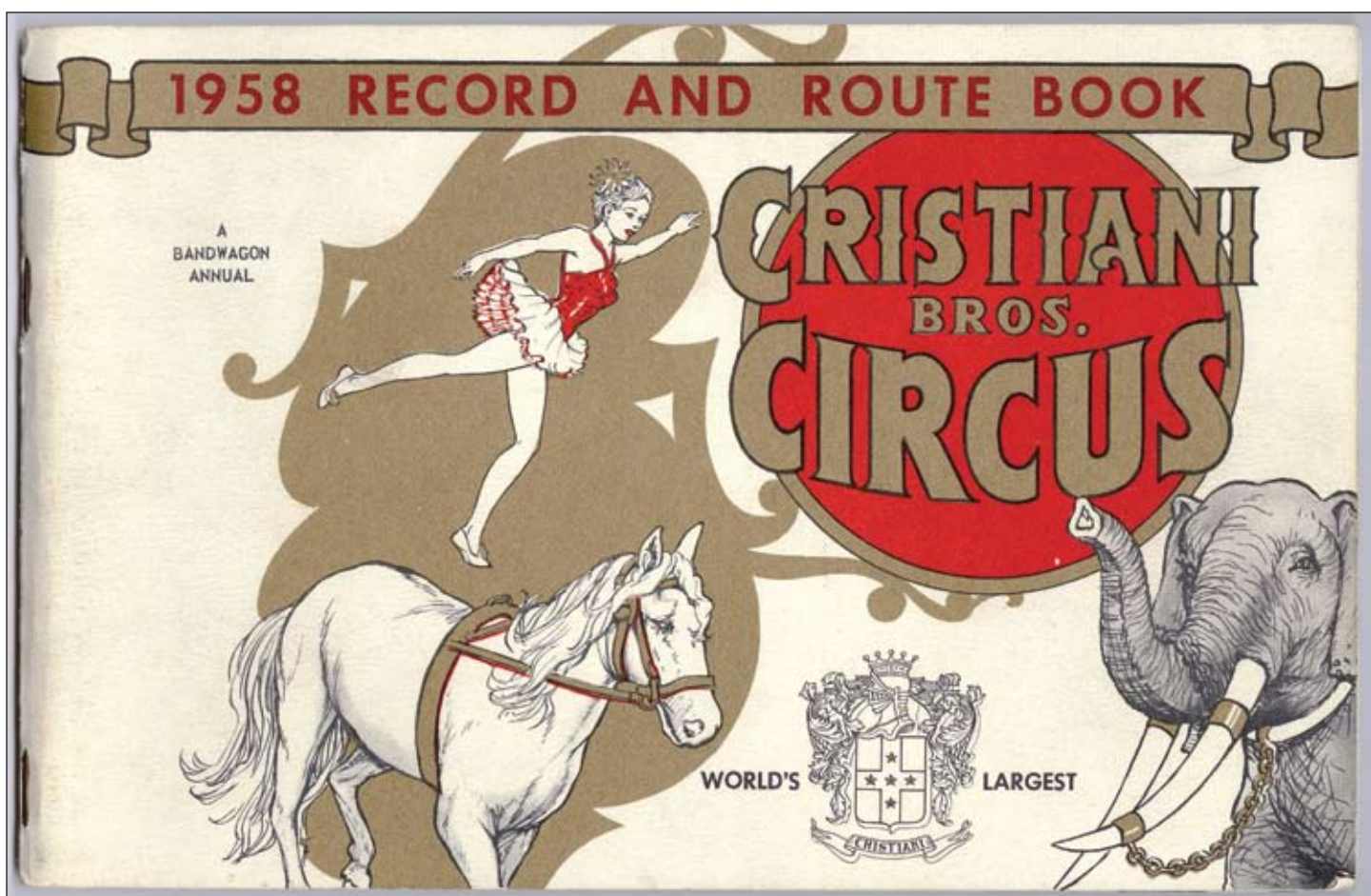
*Three seasons after Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey had last appeared in Chicago under canvas, the Cristiani Bros. Circus set up at Soldier Field. According to *The Billboard*, “the show filled the lot well and looked as substantial as the R-B show when it spread its big top and sideshow on the same lot.”*

Circus World Museum



For the 1958 season, the Cristiani Bros. show purchased a new big top that was 140' wide with three 50' center sections. The circus also had a new blue and white striped menagerie that was used for special stands, including the Chicago lakefront.

Herb George photo, Fred D. Pfening Archives



The 1958 Cristiani Bros. route book was compiled by Fred Pfening, Jr. and published by the Circus Historical Society. It includes an extensive entry about the highly successful Chicago lakefront date.

Greg Parkinson Collection

According the 1958 Route Book, Cristiani's success at Soldier Field was attributed to strong promotion and billing, with lithographs posted "right through the loop and the rest of the city," resulting in the best outdoor advertising for a circus in Chicago "in modern times."

The stand was also bolstered by a special appearance by Emmett Kelly who had also been featured on the show when it was in Philadelphia in late May. When Kelly arrived several days before the show rolled onto the lakefront lot, he was interviewed by all four of the Chicago newspapers, and made "scores of appearances on radio and television."

The publicity continued throughout the 17-day stand, probably in part because of a press dinner for 1,100 held in the big top before the opening performance, with the buffet served in Eddy Kuhn's wild animal cage.¹⁰⁹

According to *The Billboard*, the two-and-a-half week run "surprised all observers and exceeded the expectations of the show."¹¹⁰

When the show left for Milwaukee on July 13, the Cristianis announced that they had pocketed \$222,000 during that Chicago stand, crowing about the fact that the gross was considerably more than the \$158,000 that Ringling-Barnum had achieved during its final appearance three years earlier. The story did not mention, however, that Cristiani's take was tallied over 17 days, while the Ringling show was only on the lot for only nine days in 1955.¹¹¹

Despite the success that Cristiani Bros. had in 1958, the show never returned to Soldier Field. After the season ended, Cristiani, along with the new Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. and Mills Bros. circuses, were each individually approached by the Park District about using the lakefront lot in 1959 in partnership with Chicago's Chez Paree nightclub.

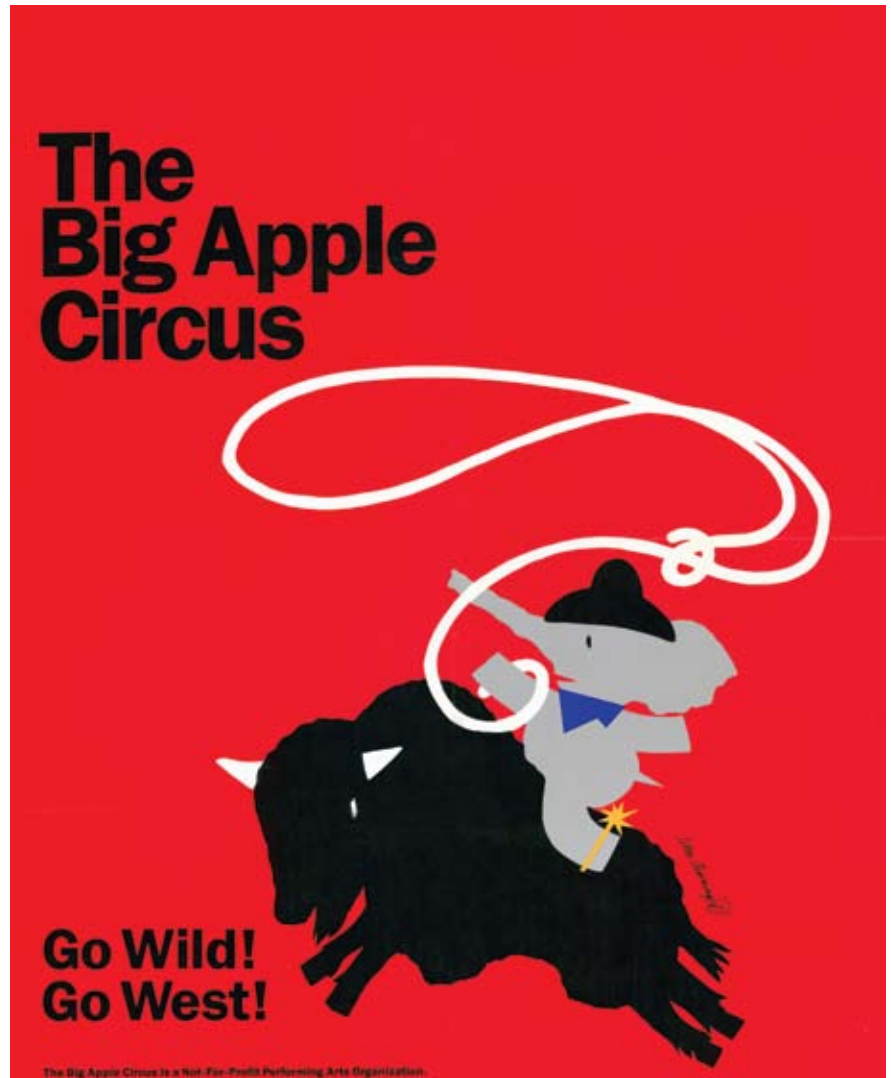
Under the proposal, the nightclub would guarantee the selected circus some \$90,000 in exchange for a commitment to set up at Soldier Field for 26 days. In addition to traditional circus acts, the nightclub promised a variety show that would include big name entertainers such as Bob Hope and Jerry Lewis as performers and guest ringmasters.¹¹²

Mills Bros. was the first to pull out of the negotiations, with Beatty-Cole and Cristiani soon to follow, and while none of those circuses ever appeared on the lakefront in coming years, in 1959 there were plenty of other tented shows vying for the attention of Chicago-area residents.

No fewer than six circuses played key dates in Chicago in 1959 including Polack Bros., Adams Bros., Mills Bros. and Hagen Bros. Cristiani Bros. also returned to the Chi-

The theme of The Big Apple Circus in 1989-1990 was "Grandma Goes West," and for the first time the show toured outside of the Northeast, setting up its big top on the Chicago lakefront for ten days in June 1990. This poster signed by the artist, Ivan Chermayeff, promoted both the traditional engagement in New York and the tour the following summer.

Circus World Museum



cago area that season, but instead of playing the lakefront it set up at three separate suburban locations. The 1959 season also marked the return of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey which set up indoors at the International Amphitheatre, its first time in Chicago since 1955.¹¹³

It was more than 30 years after that final Cristiani performance at Soldier Field before another tented circus would set up on the Chicago lakefront. Paul Binder, co-founder of The Big Apple Circus, recalled the decision to bring his show to the Chicago lakefront in 1990. "Soldier Field was a known local destination, and the people of Chicago knew it was a special place," he said. However, shortly after the show began unloading, various City inspectors made their way to the lot. "I cannot specifically tell you they were look-



Aerialist and equestrienne, Sylvia Zerbini, was a featured artist with Feld Entertainment's extraordinary tented unit that played the Chicago lakefront during its coast-to-coast tour.

both photos courtesy of Feld Entertainment, Inc.



Barnum's Kaleidoscope in 2000.

ing for payoffs,” Binder said, “but they came with their sense of responsibility and they were not satisfied that we were going to comply.”¹¹⁴

The “responsible” inspectors began making their rounds, and despite the fact that a capacity audience had been seated for the opening performance, it was 40 “exasperating” minutes before the inspectors gave the show the green light to start.

The performance presented on the lakefront lot that opening night was described by a reviewer for the *Tribune* as “magical,” and it featured Barry Lubin, in his role as “Grandma,” along with aerialist Pedro Reis, acrobats Melinda and Olivier Merlier and Ben Williams presenting Anna May, the Burmese elephant who had been entertaining Americans for generations.¹¹⁵

Still, despite rave reviews and a tremendous response from the Chicago audience, the City inspectors kept returning. “We were besieged,” Binder recalled. “We were right on the Lake so there were a lot of demands made on us.”

Yet Binder said that despite the challenges unrelated to the actual performance, the success that the show had at Soldier Field was a factor in bringing the Big Apple Circus back to the same lakefront lot in 1997 and to suburban Arlington Heights in 1998 and 1999. “We never gave any payoffs, our vision wouldn’t allow it. Instead, we supported community organizations – such as the local Boys and Girls Clubs – with tickets...and who would want to fight Santa Claus?”¹¹⁶

Even before the Big Apple Circus began touring outside of New York, Irvin and Kenneth Feld had presented their own one-ring show, the Monte Carlo International Circus Festival, which had played indoors at the Chicago Amphitheatre in April of 1979. A decade later, after observing the success that Paul Binder was having with Big Apple and Guy Laliberté with Cirque du Soleil, Kenneth Feld made a \$10 million investment in a new tented circus that was created to augment the business



In the spring of 2019, Cirque du Soleil's "Volta" continued a long tradition of tented circuses on the Chicago lakefront.

Cirque du Soleil



This 1926 photograph, taken from one of the nearby high-rise buildings on Michigan Avenue, shows the vast showgrounds at Grant Park. Immediately behind the spectacular array of Ringling- Barnum tents, north and southbound traffic can be seen on Columbus Drive. The image also shows Buckingham



Fountain during its construction, and Municipal (now Navy) Pier in the distance. Although the railroad yards and open lakefront spaces were long ago consumed by urban development, Grant Park and Buckingham Fountain remain today as popular Chicago landmarks.

model of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey and its massive shows that were presented in big arenas such as Chicago's United Center.¹¹⁷

A year after *Barnum's Kaleidoscope* had begun its nationwide tour in Los Angeles, the 76 vehicles rolled onto the Soldier Field lot, and a crew of about 100 began setting up the tents for a performance that had received critical acclaim everywhere it had played.

"I wanted to do something that was really different than what anyone had done either atmospherically or performance-wise," Kenneth Feld told *Bandwagon*. "We created an atmosphere that was, in my opinion, like nothing else."¹¹⁸

That atmosphere began with a preshow where cocktails and sumptuous food were offered along with live music and entertainment, followed by a stellar circus performance featuring an eclectic group of acts that included clown David Larible, wire-walker Alex Petrov, Sylvia Zerbini appearing with six liberty horses *and* as an aerialist, crossbow artist Guy Tell and juggler Picasso, Jr., to name but a few.

The one-ring circus was presented in an intimate yet luxurious environment where the audience watched the performance from upholstered couches and crushed velvet chairs, none of which was more than 50 feet from the performance. "We tried to make it very personalized," Feld recalled. "Ringling Bros. and Barnum and Bailey had tremendous magnitude, but this was like going to a party."

As he reflected on *Kaleidoscope* 20 years after its cross-country tour, Feld explained that despite the rave reviews and a general consensus that the show was an artistic triumph, the success of any particular engagement was dependent on the location of the circus lot. "A tent circus is a little like running a real estate business. Where we had a good location, we sold out completely. Where it was not such a good location, we weren't as successful."

Even though the modern tent, which transformed into a colorful light show at night, provided a spectacular visual for those traveling on Chicago's Lake Shore Drive, traffic patterns had changed since Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey last visited Soldier Field 45 years before, and the lot was now sandwiched between north and southbound lanes of a busy highway that made it difficult for the public to access the show. "Chicago was O.K.," Feld recalled, "but it wasn't the best."

If Soldier Field provided challenges at the box office, other locations such as Los Angeles and Dallas were big winners for *Kaleidoscope*. A triumphant run in New York delivered night after night of sold out performances in Bryant Park, a prime location in the heart of Midtown Manhattan, where the show closed on New Year's Eve 2000.

"We were really happy with the production and we learned a lot from it," Feld said. "We didn't want to go back to the same cities for the second time with the same show, and our intent was to put together another show and return later to the cities where we had success."

The plans were put on hold, however, following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, which Feld explained "hurt the entertainment business for quite some time."

Although *Kaleidoscope* was the last Feld Entertainment production to set up at Soldier Field, the lessons learned from that tour, especially related to logistics, are still in practice today. "It was an investment in our future," Feld said "We took a lot of what we learned from *Barnum's Kaleidoscope* and we use it today. We have done so many things over the years and some things work out better than others. Artistically, I was as proud of this as anything we have ever done."¹¹⁹

Another "non-traditional" circus presentation that has long been a part of the Chicago entertainment scene is Cirque du Soleil, which over a 30-year period beginning in 1989 brought 25 different productions to the city. However, it was not until 2019 that *le grand capiteau* was set up on the city's lakefront.

The show was "Volta," one of Cirque's newest productions and on May 22, 2019 it opened a 46-day stand on the same Soldier Field parking lot where so many circus performances had been held before.

On the surface "Volta" might have appeared to have had little in common with the performances presented by P. T. Barnum and Adam Forepaugh in the late 19th century. Their huge railroad circuses required acres of land to accommodate a canvas city of menageries, sideshows and a big top performance that intrigued a population that frequently had a limited education and little knowledge of the world beyond their hometowns.

Still, while the music and staging of "Volta" is much different than the performance that was staged by Dan Rice in 1862, much of the basic circus artistry seen in 2019 was very similar to that of any other big top performance presented on the Chicago lakefront over the past 150 years.

If a Chicago resident from 1862 could be transported by a time machine to 2019, it is unlikely that he or she would recognize much of the city. Many of the street names are the same, but huge skyscrapers and apartment buildings have replaced livery stables and general stores, and horses and carriages have been exchanged for luxury automobiles and express buses. Yet if you were to take that same person to the lakefront on a summer day when the circus is in town, they likely would feel right at home.

Those who scraped together 50-cents to see Jumbo would be astonished that their great-great-great grandchildren are now spending as much as \$249 for a ticket to "Volta," yet just as those long-ago crowds were transformed by the magic of the big top, the audience of today is also amazed, amused and entertained by performers with extraordinary skills from around the world.

That is the essence of the circus, and that will never change. **BW**

CROWNED WITH TRIUMPHANT LAURELS WON'ABROAD.

THE BARNUM & BAILEY GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH.

AND
IMRE KIRALFY'S
"NERO"
OR THE DESTRUCTION
OF ROME.
ALL TIME'S
MOST STUPENDOUS, SPLENDID
AND SUCCESSFUL
HISTORIC SPECTACLE

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ONLY
OLYMPIA HIPPODROME.
MILLIONAIRE MENAGERIES.
PRODIGIOUS FEATURES.
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100 CHARIOTS & DENS.
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EUROPE, THE GLORIOUS INTRODUCTION OF
A NEW, ALL ECLIPSING, FABULOUSLY
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1200 PEOPLE P.T. BARNUM J.A. BAILEY EQUAL OWNERS. 400 HORSES.



AND ONE TICKET ADMITS TO ALL.

LAKE FRONT, CHICAGO, TWO WEEKS, COMMENCING MONDAY, JUNE 23
Afternoon and Night Each Day.

CW: 21146 1890

Both P. T. Barnum and James A. Bailey were on the lakefront lot in Chicago when their show opened in the summer of 1890. Earlier that year the circus had toured Great Britain, where the spectacle "Nero and the Destruction of Rome" had received accolades from both the press and public. It was the last time that Barnum would appear in Chicago, as he died the following spring.

Acknowledgments

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The modern Chicago skyline provided a sharp contrast to the hundreds of horses that arrived in Grant Park on the morning of August 6, 1932. It would be several years before tractors and trucks replaced the scores of draft horses that had moved the circus for decades.

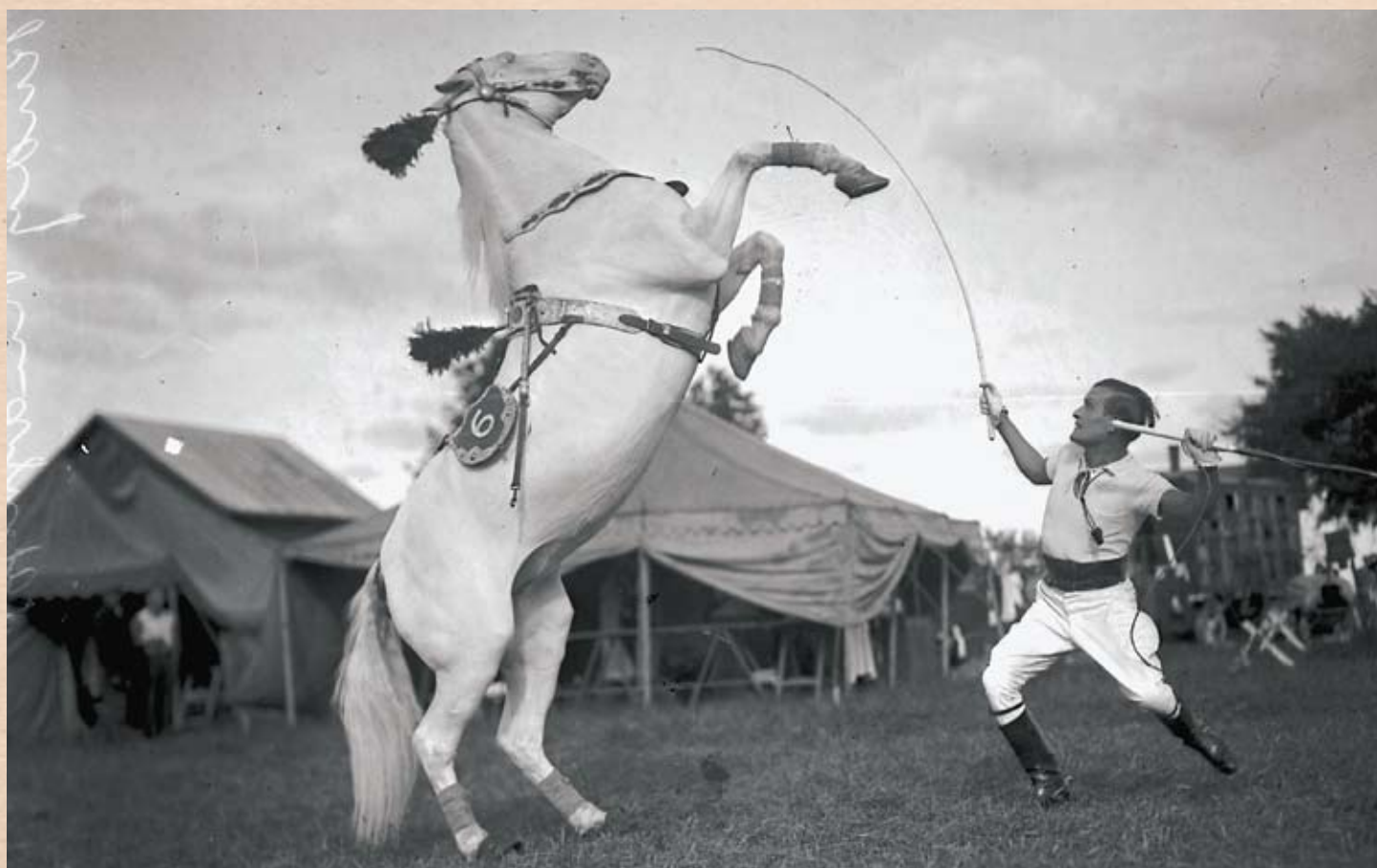
Classic Circus Views of Chicago Photographer

Harry A. Atwell

by Pete Shrake

You have certainly seen his work, every circus fan, historian, and model builder has. His images are ubiquitous. Rare is the exhibit, article, or book that does not contain some sample of his creations. He is Harry A. Atwell and he was considered by some to be “the world’s greatest circus photographer.”¹ Historian Joseph T. Bradbury once wrote:

“To my generation...Harry Atwell was the one who best recorded on film the large railroad circuses and the last of the great street parades of that era. We saw scores, even hundreds, of examples of his genius in all types of circus printed material, newspaper publicity shots, and in the circus programs of



Atwell's perfect sense of composition and timing were on display when this exhilarating photo was taken in 1936. The photographer's subject was Rudy Rudynoff who presented exceptional liberty horse acts on Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey that year and the next.



Above, Harry Atwell masterfully positioned himself to capture this scene of kids offering treats to elephants in the John Robinson menagerie tent. The picture was taken in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1930 during the show's last season of operation. John Ringling had acquired the circus, along with the four other shows of the American Circus Corporation, in October of the prior year. After the purchase, he compelled Ringling-Barnum's other one-third owners, Edith Ringling and Aubrey Ringling, to buy into the former ACC shows. The landmark acquisition had been made just days before the stock market crash that ushered in The Great Depression.



Left, big-name circus stars were among Atwell's favorite subjects when Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey played his hometown of Chicago. With some of the buildings along Michigan Avenue in the background, Atwell photographed Bird Millman in 1920. Her ballet-like dance steps and pirouettes on the slender tight-wire were universally acknowledged as a thing of beauty.

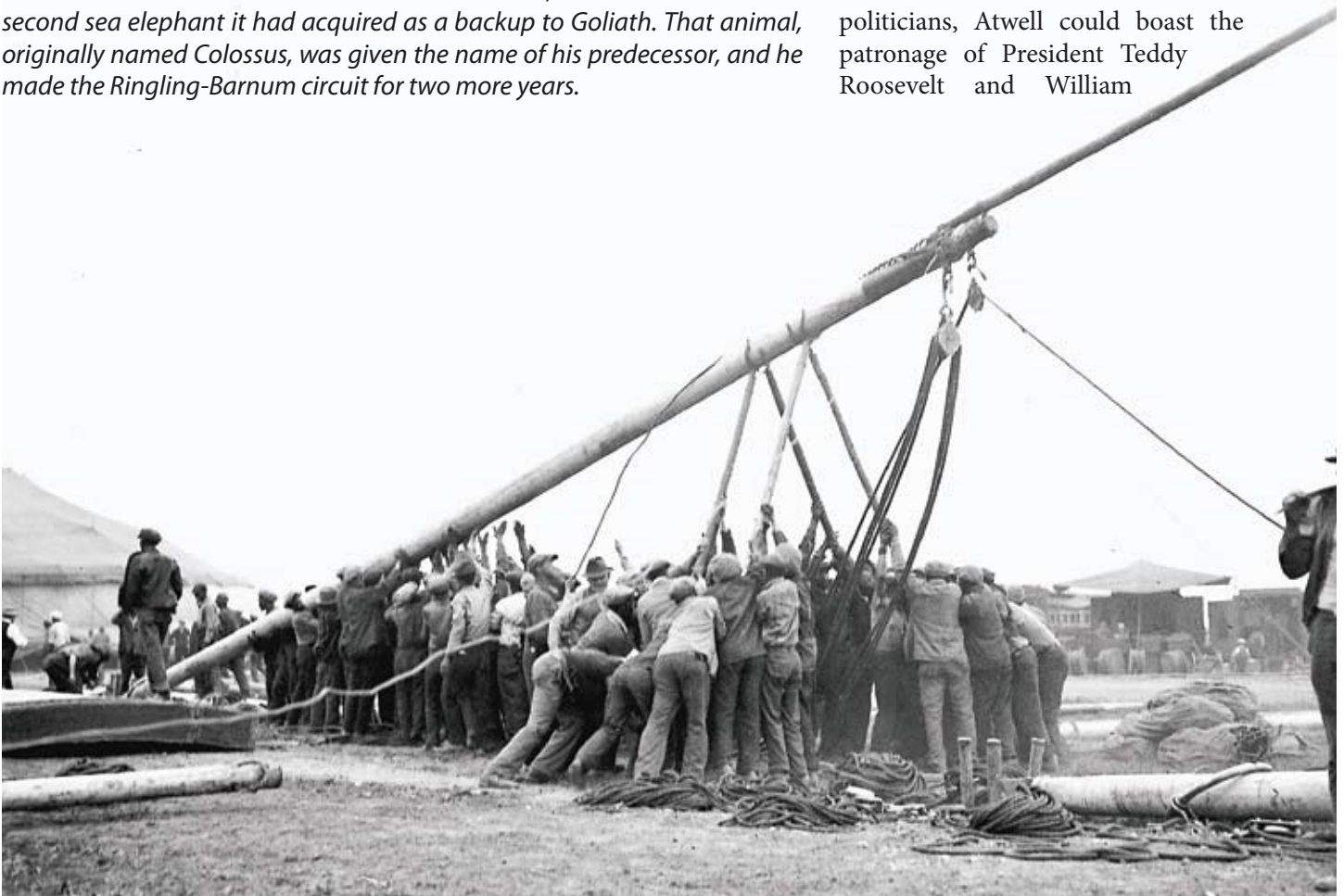


A uniformed attendant stood with Ringling's monstrous sea elephant, Goliath, on the flatbed wagon that was used to parade him around the hippodrome track in 1928 and 1929. Goliath had been purchased from the Carl Hagenbeck zoo in Germany. During the off-season, he was kept in a pen constructed on the edge of the Intercoastal waterway in Sarasota. When the bull died there after the end of the 1929 season, the show substituted a second sea elephant it had acquired as a backup to Goliath. That animal, originally named Colossus, was given the name of his predecessor, and he made the Ringling-Barnum circuit for two more years.

that day although the sepia tones of the latter never did his photography full justice.”²

Born in 1879 in Chicago, Atwell was raised in a family that included local police, firemen, and press agents. His first job was in a local steel mill but soon he found work as a reporter for the *Chicago Chronicle*. By the turn of the century, he had moved on to the *Chicago Inter Ocean* where he learned to work with a camera. It was there that Atwell first was exposed to the circus through the various press agents who would visit the newspaper offices.³

Sometime around 1900 he collaborated with Frank Burke to form the Burke-Atwell News Photo Syndicate. For over 14 years, the two men employed a team of photographers providing news photography of everything from local labor unrest to exclusive professional photos of the 1917 White Sox baseball team.⁴ A favorite of local and national politicians, Atwell could boast the patronage of President Teddy Roosevelt and William



Canvasmen strained to push up the first of the big top center poles. Atwell took this photograph just as the pole was about to reach an angle that made it possible for an elephant, attached by a cable to the top of the pole, to take over and raise it to an upright position. The first such center pole to be raised was sometimes referred to as the “king pole.” Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey, date unknown.



This 1926 photograph is a wonderful example of Atwell's ability to capture fast-moving action. It was taken during a performance of the Miller Bros. 101 Ranch Wild West.

Jennings Bryan who once exclaimed Atwell took "the best picture of me I've ever had taken." Roosevelt, in particular,

employed Atwell as his official photographer during one of his lecture tours as well as his presidential campaign of 1912.

However, Atwell always preferred theatrical and circus photography and in 1918 dissolved his partnership with Burke and started his own independent studio.⁵

There is some discrepancy as to when Atwell first connected with the Ringling brothers. Tom Parkinson thought it was about 1902 and indicated that his information came directly from Atwell him-



The unloading of elephants from railcars that transported them from town to town offered opportunities to both professional and amateur photographers for awe-inspiring shots. This early morning scene was taken during a Hagenbeck-Wallace arrival in 1922. The man guiding the elephant down the ramp is Col. William Woodcock Sr., seen here early in his brilliant career as a trainer and presenter of elephants. Woodcock also became recognized as one of America's foremost authorities on circus history.



Daisy Doll, a tiny member of the Doll family, stood on the bally platform and was introduced by veteran side show man, Clyde Ingalls, as one of the features inside the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey annex located behind the elaborately painted bannerline. This Atwell image was taken in Chicago, but the date is unknown.



This interior tent view is yet another of the many Atwell recorded in 1930 on the John Robinson Circus when it played Cincinnati, Ohio. Several of the two and three arch "Corporation cage wagons" are in the background as the master photographer focused his camera on the concessions stand within the large menagerie. The design and placement of the snack and beverage operation was such as to accommodate swift sales as customers briefly viewed the show's wild and exotic animals.

self. Yet the photographer was quoted in *Billboard* in 1948 that it was a few years later. "That was in 1910," remembered Atwell, "Alf [T. Ringling] offered me a 50-50 proposition to make and then sell souvenir postcards on the show. As my wife and I had never taken a honeymoon, we decided to make the tour." Atwell's wife was hired as Alf T.'s confidential secretary and the couple remained with the show for the duration of the season. From then on, Atwell was a go-to photographer, not only for the Ringlings, but many other shows and it was not uncommon to find press agents, managers, and show owners milling about his studio.

Described by one friend as generous to a fault and a practical joker, Atwell had an affable nature that enabled him to move easily among showfolk. It was because of his easygoing demeanor and his respect for the circus business that he could sometimes get performers to go the extra mile to get just the right shot. One such occasion took place during a performance of the Ringling show at Grant Park on the Chicago lakefront. Atwell was working with the acrobatic clown Harry Rittley whose act required the stacking and swaying of tables while sitting atop on a chair. At just the right



The lovely Harriet Hodgini and clown Jimmy McCoy modelled for this memorable photograph taken on the Sells-Floto lot during the season of 1931. After the completion of the following season's tour, the large Ringling-owned show closed permanently. The title was employed again in 1937 and 1938 when Ringling was advertised using some of its best known Corporation show titles, and in more recent times when the Felds used it as the name of their concessions company.



Harry Atwell recorded all sorts of serene scenes in the Ringling-Barnum backyard. By the time he took this photo in 1935, Antoinette Concello was well on her way to circus stardom. The legendary circus flyer first completed a triple somersault in 1937, and she has been widely credited as being the earliest woman to do so. However, a young Latvian girl named Lena Jordan executed multiple triples of the fly-bar to catcher variety in 1897 while performing in Sydney, Australia, with the Flying Jordans. Nevertheless, Antoinette's flying-return act skills were unparalleled. She left a Catholic convent in Quebec, following her older sister, Mickey King, into the world of the circus. She joined the Flying Wards in Bloomington, Illinois, where she met Art Concello. The two were married in 1929. For more than a decade, Antoinette Concello performed the triple somersault. She retired from flying in 1953, but later returned to Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey serving as Aerial Director until her death in 1984.



After ten years with Hagenbeck-Wallace, Clyde Beatty became the headliner of the new Cole Bros. Circus in 1935. That year, Atwell took this photo of Beatty staring down a crouching tiger.



This brightly lit night scene shows part of the Sells-Floto midway in 1925. The visible section of bannerline features "The Baboon King: The Natives of the Jungle," "Texas Fat Girl: A Mountain of Flesh," "M'lle Venora: the Girl with a Million Eyes," and a banner which is partially cut off, but reads "Largest Snake."



Atwell's glass plate negatives at Circus World Museum include a series of images taken of Dorothy Herbert on a rearing black horse in the backyard of the John Robinson Circus in 1929. These photographs taken of the young stunt rider marked her only season on the American Circus Corporation show.

moment Rittley would flip backwards with the chair off the tower of tables and land safely on the ground. After several takes Atwell still pressed for one more picture. Watching this, Press Agent Beverly Kelley came up and reportedly declared, "Great guns Atwell are you going to make that man risk his life again? What's the matter, didn't you get the picture?" To which Atwell replied, "Well, he wants a good picture doesn't he?" Rittley apparently did not mind and set up his act again.⁶

Atwell was not afraid to put himself at risk as well, especially when working with animal acts. Many images were taken inside the cage with any number of animal trainers, including Clyde Beatty and Mabel Stark. On one occasion his concentration led to things getting too close for comfort. Normally, Atwell would stand behind the trainer and mimic his moves so as to not alarm the animal. But once, when he was in a cage with a polar bear, the animal became a bit curious. As Atwell remembered in a 1948 interview, "As I focused, the bear's curiosity was aroused and he moved towards me, my eyes were down, intent on focusing. He continued to move ahead and I kept on re-focusing until the first thing I knew his face was flush against the box."⁷

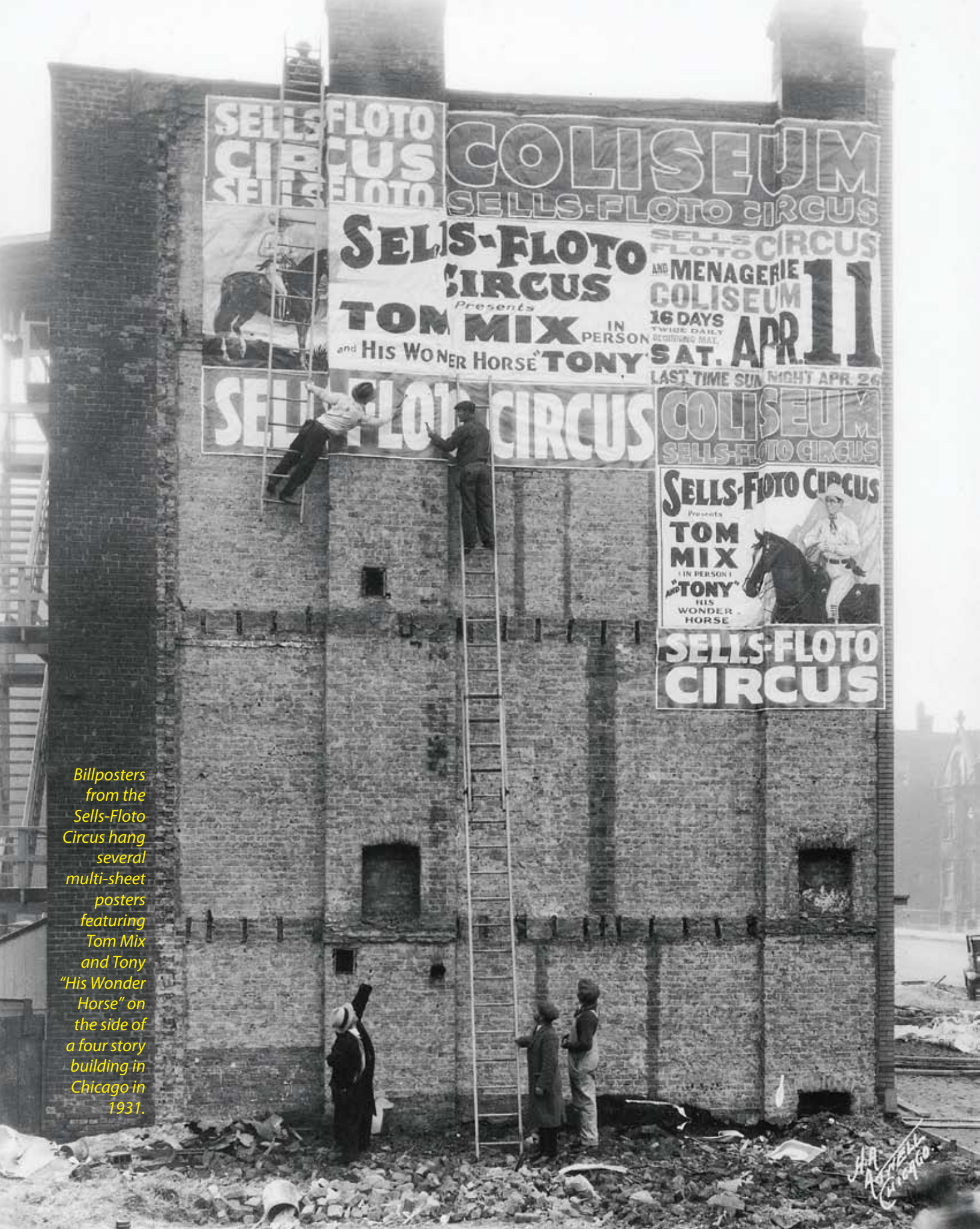
In the early 1950s Atwell retired to Sarasota, Florida, and died there in 1957. Today his images can be found in collections, both public and private, throughout the coun-

try. The largest assemblage of his work, nearly 5,000 images, can be found at Circus World Museum's Robert L. Parkinson Library. *The Milwaukee Journal* purchased the collection of negatives from Atwell in 1956 for the Wisconsin Historical Society with the understanding that the images would later be transferred to Baraboo. The collection was one of the earliest donations made for the then not yet opened Circus World Museum.

Unfortunately, the quality and ubiquitous nature of Atwell's work sometimes works against him. As historian Fred Dahlinger once wrote, "His artistry is so well known that today it is taken for granted, lessening the tribute which is truly due this exemplary artist."⁸ And an artist Atwell was. You can almost always pick out an Atwell image from a stack of photographs. His sense of composition, lighting, and ability with action shots set his images apart from the many others who have captured the circus with their lens. Atwell's work remains important. His images are an essential documentation of the circus in the first half of the 20th century.

The circus is an art form, one that is expressed in the visual delights of wagons, banners, wardrobe and live performances inside the ring. It is also an art form that inspires the work of the people who follow it, study it, and love it. Atwell was one of those people. He was an artist, and his muse was the circus. **BW**

Billposters from the Sells-Floto Circus hang several multi-sheet posters featuring Tom Mix and Tony "His Wonder Horse" on the side of a four story building in Chicago in 1931.





Staff of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey midway diner wagon pause for a minute and pose for Atwell in Chicago in 1925.

All of the images that accompany this article have been reproduced from the Harry Atwell glass plate negatives preserved at the Robert L. Parkinson Library & Research Center at Circus World Museum, excepting only the photo of Atwell himself and his business card.

Endnotes

1. "Whitmore, Eugene. "World's Greatest Circus Photographer" *The Circus Review* Vol. 11, No. 1, December 1964.
2. Bradbury, Joseph T. "The Old Circus Album," *White Tops*, May-June 1967.
3. "Circus Stars of the 1920's Photographed by Harry Atwell," *Bandwagon* Vol. 33, No. 6, 1989.
4. The Day Book, Chicago Illinois, March 18 1914; *Chicago Tribune*, Sept. 29, 1917.
5. *Chicago Tribune*, May 17, 1918.
6. Whitmore, "World's Greatest Circus Photographer."
7. Dotten, Herb. "Harry Atwell, Circus Photog, Was a Fave of Teddy Roosevelt," *The Billboard*, March 6, 1948.
8. Dahlinger, Fred. "The Harry A. Atwell Collection," Atwell Harry Small Collections File, Parkinson Library, Circus World.



Harry Atwell, 1934



Charles Cushman's Vibrant Circus Photos

by Greg Parkinson

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The six-pole Ringling menagerie of 1941 and the upper rigging of Gargantua's suspended tent frame the background of this wonderful lot scene. Elephants appear to have been a favorite Cushman subject.

Charles W. Cushman Collection:
Indiana University Archives

Approximately 14,500 Kodachrome color slides taken by Charles Weever Cushman now reside at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana. The subjects of about 150 of these are circus scenes he recorded between 1941 and 1951 when he was living in Chicago. Cushman moved to San Francisco at some point during the 1950s.

Information included in a biography written by Bradley D. Cook, the Photograph Curator at the Indiana University Archives, records that Cushman was born in Poseyville, Indiana on July 30, 1896. He lived there until enrolling in Indiana University in 1914. A little over a year after receiving his college degree in 1917, he relocated to Chicago. After a decade of working various jobs there, Cushman moved to New York in 1928. However, circumstances found him returning to Chicago a year later. After

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Color photographs in 1941 were not very common. Even more so, a Kodachrome image of a "gilly" wagon from that time period. Such small maneuverable flatbed wagons were used on the lot to shuttle hay bales, tent stakes and other supplies and equipment to where they were needed.

Charles W. Cushman Collection: Indiana University Archives

Harold Alzana (1917-2001) came to the United States from his native Wales, making his high-wire debut on Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey in 1947. He thrilled American audiences for more than a quarter of a century before retiring in Sarasota. When Cushman took this candid photo of the star warming up in 1949, the Ringling program touted Alzana as the man "Who skips rope where angels fear to tread."

Charles W. Cushman Collection: Indiana University Archives

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1937, very little is known of Cushman. He traveled extensively for several years and looked after his personal business interests, living well off his accrued wealth. Only through his incredible and wide-ranging photography can much more be determined of the man. His second wife recalled, "Charles was a shrewd individual ... a sharp evaluator of people, and was very prudent and shrewd in his securities selection. He loved life – music, good books, sports, the outdoors, travel, integrity...and could not tolerate ignorance." Cushman died on June 8, 1972 at the age of 75.

Cushman's colorful circus photography does reveal insights about his numerous and varied interests. He was obviously somewhat of a circus fan. Cushman was frequently on the Ringling lot early in the morning taking pictures of the setup, and he was unafraid to ask the biggest of circus

The woman in this 1941 picture is Kaye Clarke who performed with the Flying Concellos from 1939 through 1946. Her father was Charles Clarke, who caught Kaye's uncle, Ernest, when the great English aerialists were featured on Barnum & Bailey as the Clarkonians. Ernest was one of the earliest practitioners of the triple backward somersault. Kaye went out as a flyer with the Cole Bros. Circus in 1947. Cushman did not identify who the man in the photo was.

Charles W. Cushman Collection:
Indiana University Archives

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The "Two Jesters Calliope" paraded with Sells-Floto from 1920-1925. The wagon was then stored in the Peru, Indiana winter quarters until it was used periodically on Hagenbeck-Wallace during the 1930s. After Hagenbeck closed, it was again stored in Peru until it went to Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey for use in the 1941 spec. A team of four Clydesdale horses were pulling the calliope across the backyard in Chicago when Cushman recorded

this photograph. A couple of years later, Two Jesters found itself again in storage at the Sarasota winter quarters. In 1949, Ringling-Barnum loaned the venerable vehicle to the Museum of the American Circus (today The Ringling). Following a dispute in the late 1970s over who owned the Ringling-Barnum wagons that had been on a long-term loan to the Sarasota museum, a negotiated settlement was reached. The old Sells-Floto Calliope and the Five Graces Bandwagon became the permanent property of the museum along with several other historic vehicles, and the Ringling Bros. Bell Wagon and seven other vehicles were returned to the circus, now Feld Entertainment.

Charles W. Cushman Collection: Indiana University Archives

stars to pose for him, including the likes of Art Concello and Emmett Kelly. He had an artistic eye, and recorded many intriguing behind-the-scenes activities. Collectively, Charles Cushman's small group of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey photographs – each taken at the Soldiers Field parking lot showgrounds – help us to see the under-canvas show of that era in its most vivid colors.

Bandwagon is grateful to Bradley Cook for his assistance with obtaining permission to publish the accompanying Cushman images preserved at the Indiana University Archive. **BW**

Here, the obvious interest of the photographer was performer Ruth Bainbridge. She was married to long-term ticket seller and usher Joseph Bainbridge. Her smart-looking, uniform-style costume and matching pillbox hat were indeed striking, but this 1946 photograph is also of interest due to the bright red wagon behind the circus artist. Wagon #59 carried dressing room trunks in the mid-1940s, but not long before it had served as Fred and Ella Bradna's private quarters and dressing room on the Ringling-Barnum lot. Note the heavy-duty construction of the wagon's frame and the silver lettering with green drop shading. The wagon had been rebuilt in the early 1940s to carry the heavy trunks loaded with costumes and personal items.

Charles W. Cushman Collection: Indiana University Archives

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This D-4 Caterpillar tractor, purchased new in 1950, had a "twin" numbered B-7 that was a 1948 model. The extending boom on the front of the tractor could swing about 180 degrees from side to side. CHS member and trustee, Steve Flint, shared

this information. He also noted that both Cats were referred to as "long-frame" D-4s because their tracks were set slightly forward on the bodies in order to make the units more stable when they were being used to lift bales of canvas and other equipment. In this 1951 view, the tractor driver and workingmen were waiting for the signal to raise one of the big top center poles. Note the steel stakes to the left of the Cat's tracks and the pairs of wooden stakes driven on the other side of the tractor. This suggests that the surface of the lot was especially hard in certain locations, thus calling for the steel option.

Charles W. Cushman Collection: Indiana University Archives

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When Charles Cushman took this picture, the same "Caterpillar-yellow" D-4 tractor viewed in the above photo was in the process of raising the fifth and last of the big top center poles on the crushed rock parking lot of Soldier Field. Part of the stadium and the Chicago skyline can be seen in the distance. The big top that was being set up was the one used earlier in the 1951 season for filming many of the scenes in DeMille's timeless film The Greatest Show on Earth.

Charles W. Cushman Collection:
Indiana University Archives

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Large bale ring tents like Ringling's in 1951 required multiple sections of canvas to be unfolded and laced together on the ground to create a single mammoth spread. This task took an army of workingmen.

Charles W. Cushman Collection: Indiana University Archives

In this artistic view of the backyard activity during an afternoon performance in the summer of 1943, elephant and horse teams advance like "two ships passing in the night." The spec was "Hold Your Horses." The costumes for each of the production numbers that year were designed by Max Weldy, the others being "Let Freedom Ring," "Changing of the Guard," and "Drums of Victory."

Charles W. Cushman Collection: Indiana University Archives

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Walter McClain took over the Ringling-Barnum elephant herd near the end of 1938. He trained elephants at the Sarasota winter quarters to work in teams – both to pull wagons in the specs and to provide the motive power during train loading operations. These pairs of elephants were being harnessed in 1943 to tow cage wagons in the spec “Hold Your Horses,” a recreation of an old-time circus parade.

Charles W. Cushman Collection:
Indiana University Archives

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It made sense that this whimsical stork character with a baby was included in the 1949 “Birthdays” spec on Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey, as were the mounted knights in armor who escorted the stork. This John Ringling North era production was costumed by Miles White.

Charles W. Cushman Collection: Indiana University Archives

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Cushman photographed Hugo Schmitt in 1949 as the German elephant trainer prepared some of his elephants for an appearance in the big top. Schmitt had a long career with Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey. He came to America following the end of World War II, left Ringling after the 1949 tour, and returned to the show in 1954. Schmitt's last tour with the circus was 1970-1971.

Charles W. Cushman Collection: Indiana University Archives

Francis Brunn's first season with Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey was 1947. He came over from Germany with his sister, Lotti, who assisted Francis with his lightning-fast juggling act for the first two years in the United States. Lotti, an excellent juggler in her own right, debuted her solo act in 1949 when this photo was taken.

Charles W. Cushman Collection: Indiana University Archives

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Left to right are Willy Krause, Kaye Clark, and Antoinette and Art Concello on the Chicago lot in 1949. Antoinette and Art were both masters of the triple backward somersault on the flying trapeze. The Ringling-Barnum 1949 program referred to Antoinette as "The Big Top Goddess of Flight." She was also the show's Aerial Director at the time and for many years thereafter. Art Concello, who was General Manager of the circus, rarely permitted his picture to be taken.

Charles W. Cushman Collection: Indiana University Archives

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Lou Jacobs (1903-1992) joined Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey in 1925 and performed with the show for 60 years. His iconic image appeared on Ringling-Barnum advertising for several decades. Throughout his career, Jacobs stood out by creating his own gags such as a motorized bathtub and tiny clown car that Jacobs drove around the hippodrome track, and his hunting routine with his canine companion Knucklehead. In 1987, Kenneth Feld presented Jacobs with a Lifetime Achievement Award for his work with the circus. Cushman snapped this picture on the Chicago lot in July 1951.

Charles W. Cushman Collection: Indiana University Archives

Cascades of Color:

Billy Livingston's 1944 Costume Drawings

by Jennifer Cronk

The 1944 Ringling production team is pictured here in front of Billy Livingston's costume drawings. Seated at the table is Robert Ringling, and standing behind him from left to right are Billy Livingston, A. A. Ostrander, Pat Valdo, and Lauretta Jefferson.

Circus World Museum





Many of the costumes seen in the Madcaps portion of Panto's Paradise prominently featured a Harlequin pattern of contrasting pink and purple diamonds, such as that seen on the queen's costume. Without using this particular pattern for every costume, Livingston ensured a flow to the progression of wardrobe by bringing in complementary colors and similar design elements for some of the others utilized in this section of the spec. Circus World Museum

"Kelly has been wandering aimlessly in the arena among the acts and performers, and finally, manifestly exhausted, he slumps on a mound of trappings and equipment abandoned by the latest act and settling himself studiously for comfort, he sighs and falls into a deep sleep."¹

So begins Panto's Paradise, the 1944 Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey "super-spectacle" featuring Emmett Kelly. Few production numbers had been built entirely around a clown, but this 15 minute display took the form of a dream about a paradise where clowns ruled and Kelly was the star. The grand procession featured a seemingly endless stream of performers and elephants, all dressed in lavish designs by Billy Livingston. Mesmerizing Harlequin patterns of pink and purple diamonds evoked lively Carnival celebrations,



While Doris O'Connor is identified as the queen on Livingston's drawing, Sverre Braathen named Michelle Cuff as the queen and Felix Adler as king when the show performed in Milwaukee in September 1944. By this point, Adler had appeared in every performance of the Ringling show since 1919. It seems fitting for the man known as the "King of Clowns" to portray the king in Panto's Paradise.

Illinois State University Milner Library Special Collections

elaborate gowns and headpieces conjured images of fashionable 18th century Versailles, and exotic animal prints and feathers created jungle fantasies.

Original watercolors featuring 25 of Livingston's brightly colored costumes from 1944 were donated to Circus World Museum by longtime circus fan Dr. H. H. Conley and have been preserved at the Robert L. Parkinson Library for the past 50 years. The drawings are brought to life through the Kodachrome color photography of Sverre O. Braathen taken at Milwaukee's State Fair Park in September 1944, which are now housed at Illinois State University's Milner Library. Through the preservation of these archival treasures, we are able to imagine what it may have been like to be a spectator at the show when the costumes of Panto's Paradise transported circus goers into extraordinary worlds.



Left, the archives at the Robert L. Parkinson Library include Livingston drawings for both a zebra and leopard male elephant leader, although photographs indicate that a tiger costume also existed. All the men wore similar attire, which included a plumed turban on top of their heads. According to the back of the Livingston drawing, Robert Harris was fitted as the zebra leader.

Circus World Museum

The *Tampa Tribune* newspaper called Panto's Paradise "an extravaganza in the best meaning of the word" and reported that crowds at the winter quarters preview in Sarasota found the show, "as nostalgic as pink lemonade, yet as gay as an Easter bonnet. It appears to combine the old and the new, returning to the hoop-la style created by the Ringling founding fathers, yet retaining some of the glamor injected by the regime that was in control of the show a few years ago."² This statement refers to John Ringling North's time as Ringling president beginning in 1938, when many felt that he started to take the show in a more theatrical direction. North brought in well-known creative individuals such as Norman Bel Geddes, Max Weldy, and John Murray Anderson from the theatre world to achieve his goal of reinventing the cir-

Below, this photo demonstrates the many lavish blankets that outfitted the elephants during Panto's Paradise, including both the animal prints seen in the front and the bright pink blankets visible in the background. Performers Mary Jane Miller, Marguerite Garner, and Joyce Fay dressed in tiger print costumes for this portion of the spec.

Illinois State University Milner Library Special Collections





Each of the four seasons were represented near the end of Panto's Paradise, with an elegantly attired woman on horseback being led by a gentleman in a matching costume. Bea Mason symbolized summer in a sunny yellow gown, Jacqueline McNeil dressed as autumn in melon orange, Patty Warfield wore white as winter, and Bobby Steele depicted spring in a light green costume.

Circus World Museum



cus. Under the influence of Bel Geddes, spectators began to see a more "stream-lined" circus, including a redesigned menagerie tent and midway and a darker colored big top that made the increased number of spotlights on the performers more effective. Critics maintained that the circus under John Ringling North's leadership had a modernistic and overly Broadway feel to it, focusing more on the spectacles and production than the performances themselves.³

Sverre Braathen noted on this image of the Panto's Paradise summer and autumn costumes, "This was the best dressed spectacle ever given by the circus. Even the grooms had very beautiful wardrobe."

Illinois State University
Milner Library Special Collections



Many of the 1944 performance reviews also called out other large production numbers besides Panto's Paradise as noteworthy, including *The Cloud Ballet*. Often credited with reinventing the aerial ballet, Vander Barquette designed Ringling's aerial routines for several years during the 1940s. This included training 60 women complex cloud swing routines in 1944 to perform alongside the aerial trio of Victoria, Rietta, and Torrence.

Circus World Museum

Livingston designed a number of extravagant costumes that the Panto's Paradise script referred to as an "exaggerated Louis XIV" style. A group of male and female performers outfitted in this fashionable French wardrobe entered with fanfare near the beginning of the procession and included Violet Loyal wearing this elaborate blue gown.

Circus World Museum

Many thought that this approach would change after Robert Ringling assumed control in early 1943. At that time he referenced the previous years in contrast with the course he was planning to take, "Modernistic spectacles and features were all right for a change, but I believe fans now want a change in the other direction – back to the old time circus."⁴ Regardless of what Robert Ringling or others within the organization were saying, the overall production did not vary much during his tenure. A *Billboard* review from the Madison Square Garden opener in 1943 stated, "It will probably take another season or two before the circus really goes back strictly to its own and traditional sphere, unaffected and uninfluenced by non-circus showmanship."⁵

One major carry-over from John Ringling North's time included a unified costume design for the entire production, and numerous elaborate specs continued to be sprinkled throughout the show. John Murray Anderson had a year left on his contract in 1943 and staged five separate production numbers. Robert Ringling took over the staging the following year, but much of the production team remained the same in 1944. This included Pat Valdo serving as general director, Billy Livingston as art director and costume designer,





Left, as the last group in Panto's Paradise, the pay-off float needed to be memorable. According to the spec script, "All this cavalcade passes around the arena and moves off, terminated by a breathtaking float drawn by 24 elephants, glutted with beautiful young girls in scanty attire – each siren typifying an appeal to the senses, principally that of taste. Wealth in jewels, raiment, wine, and all manner of tempting viands are in abundance."

Circus World Museum

A. A. Ostrander as technical director and designer of properties and decor, and Lauretta Jefferson as dance director.

Although Billy Livingston had previously worked as the associate art director and designed costumes for both the main Ringling show and the one-ring Spangles circus presented by Ringling at Madison Square Garden in 1943, he appears to have taken on an even more prominent role in 1944. Still a young designer at this time, Livingston had already built a name for himself in New York. This was a remarkable achievement considering he moved to New York City from a farm near Sherman, Texas as a teenager with no formal art or design training. Livingston began to develop his own unique style by making alterations to designs he copied from magazines, Broadway shows, and museums.⁶ He worked as a burlesque performer before producer Lee

Many spectators and performers, including a young Jackie LeClaire, talked about how pretty the shocking pink Panto's Paradise pay-off float looked. This photo provides a glimpse of Emmett Kelly seated on his throne atop the float.

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Left, according to notes on Livingston's drawing, six mounted ladies wore this green velvet costume with its large red feathered hat. Three of the identified individuals were Estherina, Albertina, and Simone Loyal, members of the famous bareback equestrian Loyal-Repensky Troupe and featured performers with the Ringling show for many years.

Circus World Museum

Schubert hired him to design costumes for one of his revues. This attracted the attention of Jimmy Strook, head of Brooks Costume Company, the foremost maker of theatrical costumes in New York.⁷

People were beginning to recognize Livingston's talent as early as 1937, when *The Billboard* had the following review of his work. [He] "has done outstanding theatrical work for years, latest click being a grand job for the Paradise Restaurant. Paradise costumes show a high imagination, keen sense of color values and sharp eye for daring designs that point up female beauty."⁸ Although many considered Livingston to be one of New York's top costume designers when he began working for Ringling in 1943, the job was first offered to designer Miles White. White had previously worked under John Ringling North, but he did not care for the direction Robert Ringling wanted to take the show, and

Below, this image provides a broad look of the performers assembling for Panto's Paradise. Three of the mounted ladies are visible in the middle of the photo, surrounded by an explosion of color from the other costumes.

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Six women were to be outfitted in these Harlequin costumes and twelve in the Columbine outfits. The back of Livingston's drawing provides a lot of detail about these performers. Not only do we learn many of their names, we also see all of their body dimensions for the costumes and that some of the original lineup were taken out and replaced with other women. "No props" written on the front of the drawings indicates the show never produced the ornmented batons. Circus World Museum



The Panto's Paradise script helps to visualize the Madcaps scene. "...a score of dancers dash along in a Harlequinade, suggesting the Mardi Gras procession with multi-colored costumes, noise makers, grotesques, etc. These become a contribution to the moving scene, dancing in and out of the groups following and returning to enliven the various features."

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There is no evidence that the Ringling show produced this Livingston drawing of a dual male/female performer for the 1944 production, although the performer names Sally Cartier, Pat Cartier, and Mary Lou Weston are identified on the back. The drawing presents some interesting questions, such as how and where these costumes would have been used in the performance, as well as exactly how they would have been constructed to fit the performers as they moved about.

Circus World Museum

he felt Ringling, “wanted to cut down my lavishness.”⁹

Prior to and during his time working for Ringling, Livingston’s resume included vaudeville revues such as *Laffing Room Only*, Broadway musicals like *Something for the Boys* and *The Naked Genius*, as well as multiple 20th Century Fox films and Sonja Henie’s Hollywood Ice Revue. Livingston’s



The *Changing of the Guard* production number premiered in 1943, and its popularity led to the placement of new versions in the program the following three seasons. The display served as the grand finale in 1944, with a reported 50 elephants and 80 women costumed in plaids and bearskin caps marching to “Pageant of Progress” by Fred Jewell. According to notes from photographer Sverre Braathen, The *Changing of the Guard* “was one of the prettiest production numbers the show ever had.”

Circus World Museum



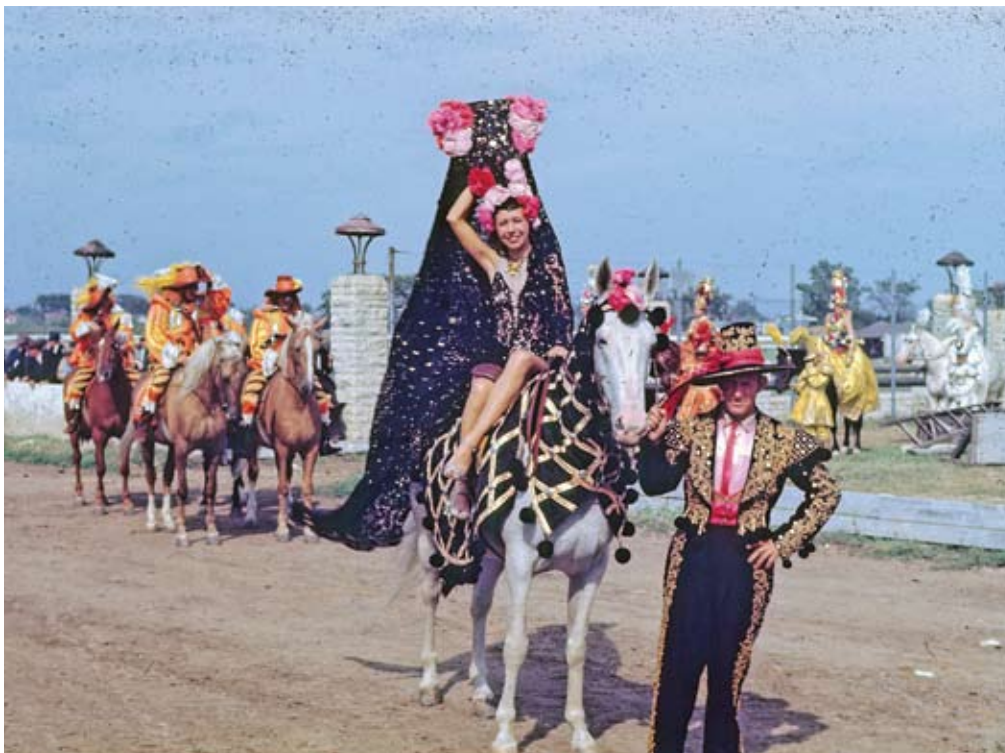
Shirley Lindemann and Cora Davis dressed for *The Changing of the Guard* 1944 grand finale, which the program billed as a “Huge Host of Gorgeously Garbed Girls and Elephants.”

Illinois State University Milner Library Special Collections



Neither the *Panto's Paradise* script nor any of the performance reviews reference this Mantilla woman, so very little is known about the role she played in the production. A notation on a separate photo in the Circus World Museum archives indicates that this was in the "Good Neighbor" section of the spec. The black lace design seen on this costume differs quite dramatically from the bright colors seen throughout the rest of Livingston's drawings, although the pink and red accents tie it in with the other costumes.

Circus World Museum



friend and colleague Bill Campbell described him as "totally charming and funny – he had a great sense of humor," which may partially explain why known names in the entertainment world enjoyed working with him.¹⁰ The director of *Something for the Boys* said he hired Livingston as the play's costume designer because actress Ethel Merman liked the

Left, Ann Simpson is identified by the image's photographer Sverre Braathen as the Mantilla woman in this photo. Portions of the four seasons performers and mounted cavaliers are visible in the background.

Illinois State University
Milner Library Special Collections

designs he did for her in the musical *Panama Hattie*.¹¹ The same could be said for his relationship with Sonja Henie. After winning three consecutive Olympic gold medals in figure skating for Norway, Henie moved to Hollywood to perform professionally as a skater and actress. Her lavish productions brought figure skating to the mainstream in the United States beginning in the late 1930s, and she insisted on Livingston's designs for many years. He received high marks for the costumes he created for Henie, including one review in 1942 that declared, "...with costuming by Billy Livingston so varied and exciting in color scheme that it often steals the spotlight from the performers who wear his creations."¹² He would later go on to become a major force in the world of ice shows, with highly regarded costume designs for Ice Capades throughout the 1950s and 1960s. A review of his first season with Ice Capades mentioned "breathtaking cascades of color,"¹³ while a 1951 review notes the show was "flashing with brilliant costumes from beginning to end."¹⁴

Livingston also did extensive work beginning in the 1940s for some of the top nightclubs of New York City such as the Latin Quarter, Versailles, and Copacabana. These hot spots exuded glamour and sophistication due in large part to the designs of individuals like Livingston. According to author Kristin Baggelaar in her history of the Copacabana night club, "Renowned for his highly imaginative use of exquisite materials, satins, chiffons, furs, ostrich and exotic bird feathers, Livingston was highly successful as a costume designer for Broadway, nightclubs, and films, and highly sought as a couturier by celebrities and fashionable women."¹⁵

Many of the reviews of Livingston's work over the years referenced his imagination and use of vivid colors, both of which can be applied to his costume designs for the 1944 Ringling production. The main spectacle, Panto's Paradise, described in the 1944 official program as "A New and Fanciful Funfeast," was reminiscent of a Mardi Gras procession full of movement and color and allegedly cost \$250,000 to produce.¹⁶ According to a review from the Sarasota preview performances at the beginning of the season, "Top-billed, and rightly so, is Panto's Paradise, middle-of-the-show spec, which overshadows all previous specs for costuming and grandeur...Rockette-style chorus gowned in checkerboard velvets of orange, yellow, purple, red and green, with ostrich plumage fore and aft, brings one back into the Ziegfeld heyday."¹⁷

But Livingston had responsibility for much more than just the design of the Panto's Paradise costumes. When he created the drawings seen throughout the pages of this article, he also had to consider the types and colors of fabric and embroideries that would work best on the performers while creating drama under the lights of the tent. This was further complicated by wartime shortages that limited the availability of some materials. Ringling needed a company that could manufacture high volumes of intricately designed costumes

and hired Brooks Costume Company to achieve this.

Billy Livingston scrutinized every aspect of the costumes, including variations in color that he viewed as unacceptable. An article written by *The Saturday Evening Post* in 1944 described Livingston, like all costume designers, as "highly temperamental" and "fanatical on the subject of nuances and degrees of color shades."¹⁸ It specifically mentions Livingston getting upset because he received elephant blankets dyed the color shocking vermillion instead of cerise.¹⁹ While the difference may have been indiscernible to most attending the circus, this attention to detail ensured that the costumes played a significant part in an overall memorable experience created by the show.

It likely pleased Livingston to hear all the reviews that mentioned the color and beauty of his costumes. One review even called the spec "a Dali exhibit come to life."²⁰ Ringling press agent Roland Butler had a way with words, and this is how he described the costumes seen in Panto's Paradise, "Every gaudy hue of the spectrum tints the garb of its almost endless parade of gay participants, each group seeming more radiant and impressive than the preceding one, in this gleaming, glittering gladsome throng."²¹

Spectators of the Ringling show had the opportunity to discover the wildly imaginative and vividly colorful designs of Billy Livingston for four seasons between 1943 and 1946. While some may recall the beautiful costumes he created, most would have a hard time remembering his name. Despite a prolific career that frequently garnered glowing reviews over 30 years in the worlds of Broadway, the circus, and figure skating, Billy Livingston has not been recorded in the history books as an influential costume designer. Luckily, the preservation of his 1944 drawings in the archives of the Robert L. Parkinson Library at Circus World Museum ensures that his brilliant designs will continue to be admired and his legacy will live on in the annals of circus history. **Bw**



About the Author

Jennifer Cronk lived in the Midwest before moving to Colorado to obtain her Master's in Anthropology with a focus in Museum Studies from the University of Denver. After spending ten years as the Curator of Collections at the Aurora History Museum in Colorado she accepted her

current position as the Curator of Circus History at Circus World Museum in late 2018. She currently lives in Baraboo with her husband and son.

Following the pandemonium of the Madcaps segment of Panto's Paradise, a small group featuring a medieval princess entered the procession. A close examination of the back portion of this photo reveals some of the details of her covered litter, as well as a view of the costumes of the men who served the princess.

Illinois State University
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Endnotes

1. Robert Little, Panto's Paradise script retyped from carbon copy of original, Circus World Museum.
2. "32,000 Attend Two Preview Shows," *Tampa Tribune*, March 27, 1944, p. 2.
3. "RB Scores Straw Peek," *The Billboard*, April 1, 1944, p. 34.
4. "Evans, Bands Back to RB," *The Billboard*, February 13, 1943, p. 36.
5. "RB Pulls War-Bond 14,000," *The Billboard*, April 17, 1943, p. 53.
6. "Results of Livingston's 'Day-Dreams' Are Ice Capades' Brilliant Costumes," *Bakersfield Californian*, November 23, 1962, p. 9.
7. Robert W. Little, "A Biographical Career Sketch of Billy Livingston."
8. "Possibilities," *The Billboard*, October 30, 1937, p. 29.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. "Broadway Premier is No Bogy for Director of 34 Musicals," *New York Herald Tribune*, January 24, 1943, p. E2.
12. "Indpls. Rates New Henie Revue As Lavish Spectacle; Short on Speed," *Variety*, December 2, 1942, p. 46.
13. "Ice Show Reviews: Ice Capades of 1950," *Variety*, September 14, 1949, p. 52.
14. "Brilliant Colors in Ice Review," *Women's Wear Daily*, January 22, 1951, p. 3.
15. Kristin Baggelaar, *The Copacabana*, (Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2006), p. 86.
16. Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus Magazine 1944, p. 50.
17. "Program Points in Performance at Sarasota Preview, March 26," *The Billboard*, April 8, 1944, p. 36.
18. "How to Dress a Broadway Show," *Saturday Evening Post*, June 24, 1944, p. 74.
19. Ibid.
20. "RB Scores Straw Peek," *The Billboard*, April 1, 1944, p. 57.
21. "Circus by Ringling," Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus Magazine 1944, p. 3.

Helen Wallenda played the part of a princess being carried in a sedan chair while wearing this gown containing 18 yards of purple fabric. The Panto's Paradise script offers a good description of how this was presented in the display. "A pageboy with streamer held aloft precedes four bearers of a litter, ornamented with moated castle turrets and battle flags, on which is reclining a Princess in medieval costume."

Circus World Museum



The "Deacon"

David W. Blanchfield

by Dale Williams

The unsung heroes of every circus were the men, and more recently the women, who moved the show, set it up and tore it down. Most of them throughout American circus history are relatively unknown today, even though they spent the majority of their working lives on various shows. One of the most interesting of these hard-working individuals was David W. Blanchfield. In his case, we know quite a bit about his life and his place in circus history.

The moniker "Deacon" came about early in his career. Referring to an interview with Blanchfield that Robert Parkinson conducted at the Circus World Museum Library in 1968, Bob stated, " 'The Deacon' hastens to remind anyone that his nickname 'Deacon' is in no way accountable to his religious activities - rather to his reputation for a capacity



The photo on this Christmas card signed by Deacon Blanchfield, tells of the type of work he did when he began his career with Barnum & Bailey driving draft horse teams that pulled the show's wagons to and from the lot.

Dale Williams Collection

to preach a sermon of disdain to anyone with whom he finds disagreement." In other words, Blanchfield's ability to "read out" anyone, gained him his nickname "The Deacon."¹

Blanchfield was born in Hartford, Connecticut on April 27, 1889. His parents were John and Hannah. David was the fifth of six sons in the family. We do not know much about his early life and education, however, a reference was found for a David W. Blanchfield in the 9th grade (4th Class they called it) at Hartford High School in 1904. He never married.

Exactly when Blanchfield was first employed by the Barnum & Bailey Circus has not been determined. In fact, he did not himself know when interviewed in the late 1960s. He most likely joined the show in winter quarters in Bridge-

port, and it was probably in the nineteen-teens. Blanchfield was a train team driver (teamster in public jargon).

We do know that Blanchfield left to serve in the U. S. Army during World War I (September 5, 1917 – March 14, 1919)² with a machine gun battalion in Europe. After the war, he returned to the United States in 1919 just in time to join the new Ringling-Barnum combination, resuming his previous line of work as a train team driver. He remained with Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey until about 1930 (the exact year is unknown), and then he moved over to the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus working as a teamster through 1934. Thereafter, he returned to Ringling, and after the conversion from draft horses to Caterpillar tractors he became a “Cat” driver on the lot in 1938. In 1942, Deacon was promoted to Superintendent of Trucks (including tractors) with the show. The 1942 RB&BB Route Book lists him as Superintendent of the Truck Department.³ He had two assistants and 53 additional personnel worked under him that year. The 1944 Route Book lists Blanchfield as Superintendent of the Truck and Tractor Dept. with two assistants and 26 additional employees.

On Thursday, July 6, 1944, while Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey was on the second day of a two-day stand in

Hartford, Connecticut, at the Barbour Street showgrounds, the tragic big top fire took place during the afternoon performance. Approximately 20 minutes into the show shouts of “fire” were heard throughout the tent. The 48-foot high big top was destroyed in less than ten minutes. Some people fleeing the burning tent were blocked by the metal chutes that were still in place as wild animals were being transferred back to cage wagons outside.

In *The Circus Fire*, the book’s author, Stewart O’Nan, recorded that Deacon Blanchfield directed his water trucks. He quotes Blanchfield as saying,

“I started the trucks over to protect the wild-animal cages, and someone told me there were people in there burning, and I countermanded the order the put the trucks to work....They told me there was a little boy burning in the exit, and when the trucks came to the exit, I stopped them at the exit, and had them play water only on these people.”⁴

After the horrible incident in Hartford, five officials with Ringling Bros. and Barnum and Bailey were charged with manslaughter. Police prosecutor, Burr Leikind, charged



In this photograph, the Deacon is directing Ringling-Barnum equipment into a building and sharing some information with a local cab driver. The date is not known.

Dale Williams Collection

James A. Haley, Vice President of the circus; Edward Versteeg, Chief Electrician; David W. Blanchfield, Supt. of the Truck and Tractor Dept.; George W. Smith, General Manager; and Leonard Aylesworth, Boss Canvasman. The five men were arrested during the night by Hartford Police. The coroner, Frank D. Healy, subpoenaed the five officials along with 15 other executives to an inquest.⁵ Haley and Smith were released on \$15,000 bond each and Versteeg, Blanchfield and Aylesworth on \$10,000 each.⁶

The coroner found that Haley and Smith should have known of the dangerous conditions of the big top. Aylesworth was blameworthy for his inadequate supervision of the canvas waterproofing, distribution of fire equipment, and oversight of the fire watchers. Versteeg, who was in charge of distributing fire extinguishers, failed to distribute enough of them. Seat man Caley had failed to keep a lookout for fire as was his specific job, and Blanchfield had placed wagons too close to the exits, thereby restricting escape.⁷

In April 1945, before the show opened in Madison Square Garden, the five men returned to Hartford for a second hearing. Their lawyers had asked and received approval for the men to withdraw their “no contest” pleas. The lawyers had argued that the men were “indispensable” to the circus and that their sentences should be suspended. The judge did not suspend their sentences, but he did significantly reduce them. Haley, Smith and Aylesworth each received a one-year and one day to five years maximum sentence. Versteeg and Caley received lesser sentences. Blanchfield, the only one of the five who appeared to be remorseful and candidly admitted that he was not indispensable to the circus, was set free.⁸

The 1946 Ringling-Barnum Route Book lists Blanchfield under the Wardrobe Dept. The 1947 Route Book lists Blanchfield as one of four assistants under Frank McClosky⁹ in the Property Department. That department had a total of 35 employees. In 1949, Blanchfield was back as Superintendent of the Truck Department with one assistant and 49 employees. The 1951 Route Book again lists Blanchfield as



David W. “Deacon” Blanchfield on a hot and dry lot in Parkersburg, West Virginia, July 13, 1954.

Illinois State University Milner Library Special Collections

Superintendent of the Truck Department with 36 employees. He remained with the show through the 1955 season as Supt. of Trucks.

An article in *Bandwagon* in 1987 about Michael Burke and the 1955 tour of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey related that Burke learned prior to the arrival of the show in Chicago about what he referred to as the “Sneeze Mob.” He characterized the group as the people on the show who controlled the rackets like skimming ticket sales and dice games, as well as whiskey and beer sales. John Ringling North had told him to clean up the rackets, but North did not let him know that the show’s former General Manager, Art Concello, had essentially been in charge of the activity. Among other things, Burke said that he learned that Deacon Blanchfield had been primed by the new General Manager, Frank McClosky, to ridicule Burke as a know-nothing first of May.¹⁰

The Deacon was not with the show in 1956 as he was unhappy with the way the show was run. In 1957, he returned when the show was moved by trucks and was assistant ringmaster in addition to his transportation duties. In 1960, when the show returned to the rails, he became trainmaster. The 1964 and 1965 Ringling route books listed him on the Executive staff as Transportation Superintendent. Blanchfield retired from Ringling after the 1965 season.

A few years after his retirement, the Deacon was contacted by C. P. “Chappie” Fox, the Director of Circus World Museum, to see if he would be interested in spending his summers at Circus World Museum in Baraboo. Deacon accepted the offer of a volunteer position and he relocated to Baraboo. There he drove a D-4 Cat tractor and helped take care of the Museum’s draft horses.

My exposure to the Deacon began in 1971 when I first joined Circus World Museum as a summer intern in the Library. Bob Parkinson had reserved a room for me in the boarding house owned by Elsie Burton that was located directly across from the CWM main entrance. The Deacon’s room was on the back porch of the same house. Probably



Blanchfield was Superintendent of the Trucks for Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey when Sverre Braathen observed him direct one of his drivers whose Mack Truck became stuck as it pulled a string of menagerie wagons. Braathen took this picture on July 10, 1955 in Akron, Ohio.

Illinois State University Milner Library Special Collections

because I was 23-year old, the Deacon originally did not say too much to me, but over the course of the summer we became better acquainted and he opened up a little. I moved to an apartment after several weeks when I became the full-time Business Manager of the Museum. One of my job assignments was to arrange transportation for the Deacon to and from Sarasota. He was 82 years old, still wearing a white shirt and tie (with the tie flipped back over his shoulder) as he shoveled horse manure and drove one of the Caterpillar tractors that had been on the Ringling show during the years he was there. He was a very proud man and did not suffer any fools. Nevertheless, he was in declining health.

During the loading of the circus train in Baraboo for the Schlitz Circus Parade, Deacon drove a Cat pulling wagons and positioning them at the base of the runs to be loaded on the flatcars. On one particular hot and very dusty day, he started to pull the Ringling "doniker" (restroom) wag-

ons 98A and 98B in tandem up the runs with the Cat. It had been a tight turn into position, and he did not get the wagons exactly lined up with the runs. The second wagon's rear wheels went partially off the runs. I was standing next to Chappie Fox at the time, and Chappie yelled at him. The Deacon climbed off the Cat, walked over to Chappie, and said "If you are so g**d*** smart Mr. Fox, you load it!" He then walked off the job and back to his rooming house. That was nearly the end of his Cat driving career, although he did go to Milwaukee and pull wagons on the parade assembly area and he finished the summer working with the draft horses.

I brought him back to Baraboo in the spring of 1972, but his health was poor and it was apparent he would not be able to finish the season. A nephew in Connecticut had been corresponding with me, and he and I were able to contact the Veterans Administration and locate his World War I papers.



The Deacon worked on the Circus World Museum train crew in 1971, seen here driving one of the old Ringling-Barnum D-4 Caterpillar tractors during train loading operations in Baraboo.

Dale Williams Collection

I then arranged for an airline ticket to Connecticut, and he was admitted to a Veterans home just outside Hartford. The Deacon died at the Rocky Hill, Connecticut Veterans Home on November 13, 1980 at age 91.

In my research of the Deacon's life, I found that there were several David W. Blanchfields from Connecticut. I located one relative, Father David W. Blanchfield, who lived

in Norwalk, Connecticut. In an email I received from him, he stated that the Deacon was his father's first cousin. He wrote, "He was a character in the best sense of the word. I only got to meet him once or twice as a kid when the circus was in town, but it was always a great event when he came. Sorry that I do not know more nor is there anyone alive that I could refer to you."¹¹ **BW**



Blanchfield in 1971 on the Old Milwaukee Days showgrounds during preparations for the Schlitz Circus Parade.

James Cole photograph

About the Author



A circus fan since age seven, Dale Williams has a special interest in the history of the 101 Ranch of Ponca City, Oklahoma and the Miller Bros. 101 Ranch Wild West. He has met many circus notables over the decades, Deacon Blanchfield being among them. Dale was a long-term Circus World Museum employee, and he served the Wisconsin Historical Society as Director of two of its historic sites, H. H. Bennett Studio in

Wisconsin Dells and Reed School near Neilsville. He enjoys researching behind-the-scenes aspects of outdoor show business. Dale is originally from Oklahoma, although he has spent nearly 50 years in Baraboo and now winters in Port St. Lucie, Florida.

Endnotes

1. Interview of David Blanchfield recorded by Robert Parkinson at Circus World Museum, August 6, 1968.
2. U. S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs BIRLS Death File, 1850-2010.
3. Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey 1942 Route Book.
4. Stewart O'Nan, *The Circus Fire*, New York: Doubleday, 2000, p. 110.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Henry S. Cohn and David Bollier, *The Great Hartford Circus Fire – Creative Settlement of Mass Disasters*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991, p. 53.
8. Ibid, p. 54.
9. Listed both as McClosky and McCloskey, originally Miecznikowski. His life span was 1907-1979.
10. Bob Hasson, "1955 Tour of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus," *Bandwagon*, November-December, 1987.
11. Email from Father David W. Blanchfield, March 8, 2010.

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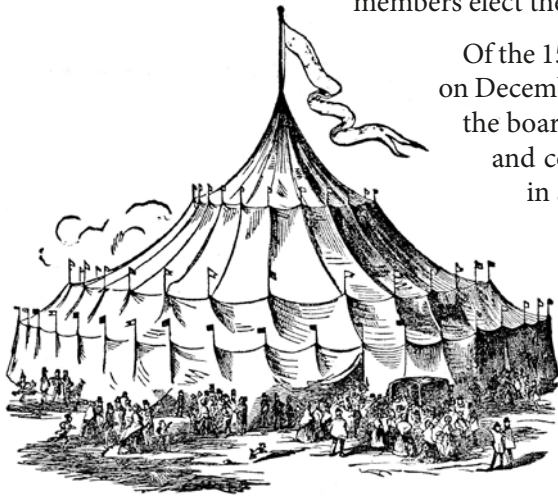
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Circus Historical Society

Board of Trustees Election, Official 2019 Ballot on reverse

The Code of Regulations of the Circus Historical Society allows for the election of trustees by mail. Elections are held every four years for board membership with terms beginning January 1 after the election. After being seated, the board members elect the officers from within their group.



Of the 15 members of the Board of Trustees, ten members will complete their terms on December 31, 2019; six of these members have expressed interest in continuing on the board to further the work of CHS. Our sincere appreciation for the dedication and commitment to all who have served as a member of the Board of Trustees in supporting CHS.

You will be voting for ten board members. Write-in candidates are allowed.

Your ballot must be received by Alan Campbell, CHS Elections Commissioner, by December 1, 2019. Send the completed ballot to
Alan Campbell
CHS Election Commissioner
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Greensboro GA 30642-3438

Nominees for the CHS Board of Trustees

Chris Berry's (*incumbent*) two passions are broadcasting and the circus. Growing up just outside of Sarasota, Chris had the opportunity to meet some of the great circus stars of the 20th century and the fire was lit. By the time he was 14, Chris was a member of CHS and a regular volunteer at the old Circus Hall of Fame. His interest in circus history and expertise in the area of circus lithographs blossomed as he learned from and was mentored by some of the most respected circus historians of the time. After a career with CBS and ABC where he held executive positions in Los Angeles, Washington D.C., New York and Chicago – Chris is now a Senior Vice President at iHeartMedia where he divides his time between gathering and distributing the news of today, and studying the history of the circus in America.

Maureen Brunsdale (*incumbent*) is a graduate of St. Olaf College, the University of Iowa, and the University of South Dakota. Maureen has been a Special Collections and Rare Books Librarian at Illinois State University since 2009. It was there where her world first collided most delightfully with the circus. She oversees four unique collections in her job at the Milner Library, none more fascinating (or alluring) as the Circus & Allied Arts Collection.

Dave Carlyon began his romance with circus when he flopped in his first performance as a Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey clown. But he soon learned from mentors, audiences, and mistakes, and in his 3rd year, he became Ringling's "Advance Clown Ambassador." Before circus, he earned a University of Michigan degree, a law degree from the University of California-Berkeley, and served in the Army as a military policeman. Clown and MP experience may explain why, later a New York actor, he specialized in comic roles and authority figures. Earning his PhD from Northwestern, he turned his dissertation into the award-winning *Dan Rice: The Most Famous Man You've Never Heard Of*. CHS

awarded the Stuart Thayer Prize for his second book, *Education of a Circus Clown: Mentors, Audiences, Mistakes*. He has written for *Bandwagon*, the *Smithsonian*, academic journals, and given circus talks around the country.

Jim Foster's (*incumbent*) professional career as a newspaper journalist always included circus stories and interviews with such luminaries as Henry Ringling North, Rudy Bundy, and Dr. J. Y. Henderson. Later, in retirement, the circus became a labor of love as he edited *The White Tops* for the CFA. Through the years, however, he was most drawn to the logistics . . . laying out the lot, spotting the wagons, providing food for personnel and animals, and then getting it all loaded in proper order on the railroad flatcars to hurry on to the next town. He clearly remembers as a youth standing at a rail siding in the dark of night as the last generator wagon was pulled up the runs. His dedication to circus history is a natural follow-on.

Peter Gorman is a long-time member of the CHS. He has also been a board member of the Circus Hall of Fame for 23 years, and currently serves as Vice President and Inter-Museum Liaison. Peter is a Circus Model Builders member whose model is on exhibit in French Lick, Indiana. He is the proud owner of seven historic circus wagons including the Two Hemispheres Bandwagon. Peter is currently lobbying various Indiana state organizations for the restoration of the Peru Winter Headquarters and multi-purposing of the property as part of a larger long-term community redevelopment.

William J. Hansard is a doctoral candidate in the Transatlantic History program at the University of Texas at Arlington. He

continued on reverse side

earned a BA in History from UTA in 2015. William's first exposure to the circus was through playing in the traveling Backyard Circus of the late Bill Carpenter, a small interactive children's show that appeared at the State Fair of Texas for many years. William served as an intern in the archives at The Ringling, where he worked on the cataloging and digitization of route books and newspaper articles. He now infuses circus history in everything he does including presentations to local historians. William's dissertation will focus on labor and fraternalism in the circus during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. William is a recent contributor to *Bandwagon*, and he presented at the 2019 CHS convention.

Kristin Lee is a Research Data Librarian at Tufts University in Medford, MA. She came to enjoy the circus through Jumbo the elephant (Tufts' beloved mascot) and then couldn't stop reading and researching to try and collect information that she could put on maps to present the history of the circus in all kinds of new ways. She is particularly interested in the history of the Barnum & Bailey circus, how the routes were devised, and how the circus impacted the small communities it visited over the years. She has worked on volunteer committees to organize conferences, manage member data, and to recruit new members.

Wayne McCary (*incumbent*) has been a lifelong circus enthusiast. He is a graduate of the University of Hartford. He has spent his entire professional career in the fair, circus and arena industries. He recently retired as the President of the Eastern States Exposition, the nation's 5th largest fair. In 1970, he founded and produced through 2012 the Exposition's Super Circus that remains one of its premier attractions. He was also the longtime producer of the Maine Shrine Circus tour and is the namesake of Circus Fans Association Tent #172. Today he is an active circus producer and consultant in the fair industry. He serves as Vice President of the Federation Mondiale du Cirque in Monaco and chairs the Outdoor Amusement Business Association circus committee.


Julie Parkinson (*incumbent*) has over 25 years of experience in the circus and entertainment industry. Her performing career spanned 15 years, beginning at Circus World Museum and later performing on Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey's Blue Unit, among other shows. In 2003, Julie joined the Big Apple Circus where she served as Company Manager for three years. Julie spent a decade working for Cirque du Soleil on productions in-

cluding The Beatles LOVE, VIVA Elvis, and Zarkana as a staff member and later as a freelance designer and painter. She is the first third-generation member of CHS. Julie is the daughter of the *Bandwagon* Editor and the granddaughter of Bob Parkinson, founder of the Robert L. Parkinson Library and Research Center at Circus World Museum. Julie is a recent contributor to *Bandwagon*, and she hopes that her experience, ideas, and network will help generate new memberships for CHS.

John F. Polacsek (*incumbent*) became interested in tracing the routes of early circuses after discovering an 1835 metal printing plate that a branch of the Zoological Institute used to advertise their menagerie while traveling through Ohio. John extended his research, and in 1974 produced *The History of the Circus and Menagerie in Ohio Before 1860*, as his masters thesis at Bowling Green State University. In researching early circuses, he has used newspapers, diaries, route cards, and route books to verify circus routes. He has also provided numerous photographs for route books and advertising that has been issued by Carson & Barnes Circus. He is a past President of CHS.

Kurt Schmidt works for the Milwaukee Area Labor Council as the AFL-CIO Community Service Liaison. Prior to this, he was a labor leader in the BCTGM after earning a degree in Hotel and Restaurant Cooking. He also serves on the WOW Workforce Development Board that helps community youth and adults achieve their goals. He serves on the Waukesha County Labor Council as its Secretary, and he volunteers with the Waukesha County Nutrition Coalition. Kurt has three young granddaughters, and he takes every opportunity to build memories with them. He has a large clown collection, and has not given up on his dream to one day join the circus as a clown.

Kat Vecchio is a documentary filmmaker and writer in New York whose work explores American entertainment history and popular culture. Her current circus research interests are focused on the lives of female performers from around 1890 to the early 1940's. She works as the director of grant-making at Fork Films and was an associate producer for Fork Films' recent documentary *The Trials of Spring*. She has written articles for *Atlas Obscura* and *Narratively* about circus and burlesque history, and she produced and directed a feature documentary about roller derby. Kat is a graduate of Smith College and the Graduate Center, City University of New York.

 **Detach and mail ballot**

Circus Historical Society
Official 2019 Ballot

Vote for ten candidates

- ☐ Chris Berry
- ☐ Maureen Brunsdale
- ☐ Dave Carlyon
- ☐ Jim Foster
- ☐ Peter Gorman
- ☐ William J. Hansard
- ☐ Kristin Lee
- ☐ Wayne McCary
- ☐ Julie Parkinson
- ☐ John F. Polacsek
- ☐ Kurt Schmidt
- ☐ Kat Vecchio

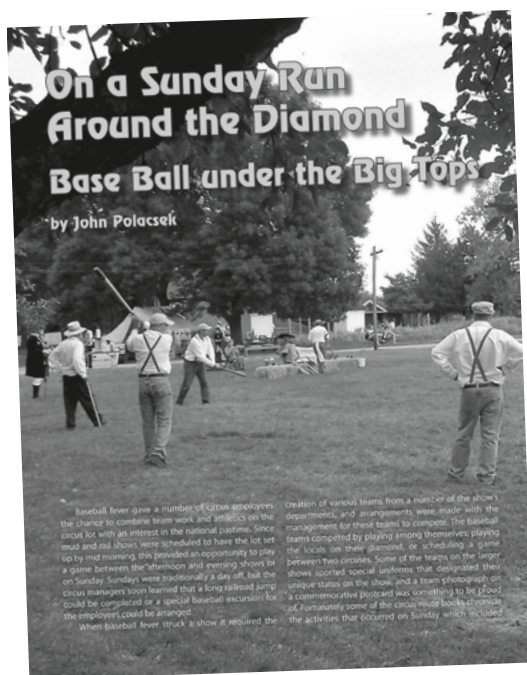
Write in candidates

Send this completed ballot to:

Alan Campbell
CHS Election Commissioner
1125 Wharfside Court
Greensboro, GA 30642-3438

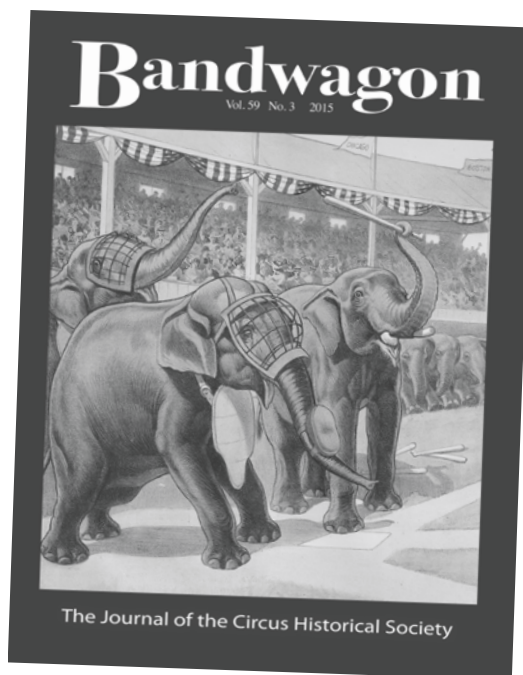
**To be received before
December 1, 2019**

Not Used



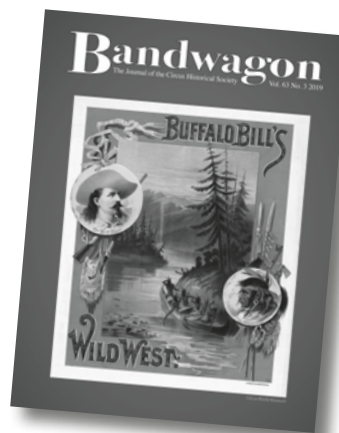
Join the Circus Historical Society

The Circus Historical Society, Inc. is an 80 year old organization dedicated to the preservation of circus history by presenting its premier journal, the *Bandwagon*, full of anecdotes, photos, routes, and remembrances. You'll



thrill to the excitement of shows from long ago to the ones on the road last year in the *Bandwagon*, the greatest Circus Periodical on Earth.

Your membership also brings you the Circus Historical Society's newsletter "News and Views" with great brief news pieces that are current in the circus world, museums, about our members and reviews of shows, books and films. The CHS also offers to the world its fabled website at www.circushistory.org which is viewed throughout the world over 1000 times a day. We can also be found in the social network, Facebook, where people share their photos, thoughts and questions for all to see. You'll find special events and timely information here also.



Name _____ Phone # _____

Address _____ Email _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Make Check Payable to CHS: \$60.00 US ___ \$80.00 Canada ___ \$105 International _____

Mail to: Bob Cline, CHS Treasurer, 2707 Zoar Road, Cheraw, SC 29520-4133

Email Bob Cline at 5Tigeract@gmail.com

What is the Circus Historical Society?

The Circus Historical Society is a tax-exempt, not-for-profit educational organization founded in 1939 to preserve and record the history of the American circus. Our membership includes historians, scholars, circus professionals, memorabilia collectors, archivists, specialists in popular culture, writers and circus enthusiasts, all of whom share a passion for this great institution and a desire to preserve that heritage.

Bandwagon, the Society's quarterly journal, features articles on an eclectic mix of circus-related topics. In the last few years, in-depth articles have been published on parade wagons, elephants and other animals, circus printers and posters, clowns, winter quarters, bands, and trains. Many biographies, memoirs and interviews with circus luminaries have been published, too. Lavish photo essays appear in most issues. Pieces on the logistical, financial and the business side of the circus are often featured.

Complementing the magazine is *News and Views*, an online newsletter; a Facebook page; and a website filled with over 1200 pages of historical content including both primary and secondary source material. A special online feature, available exclusively to Society members, provides access to every issue of *Bandwagon* back to 1942.

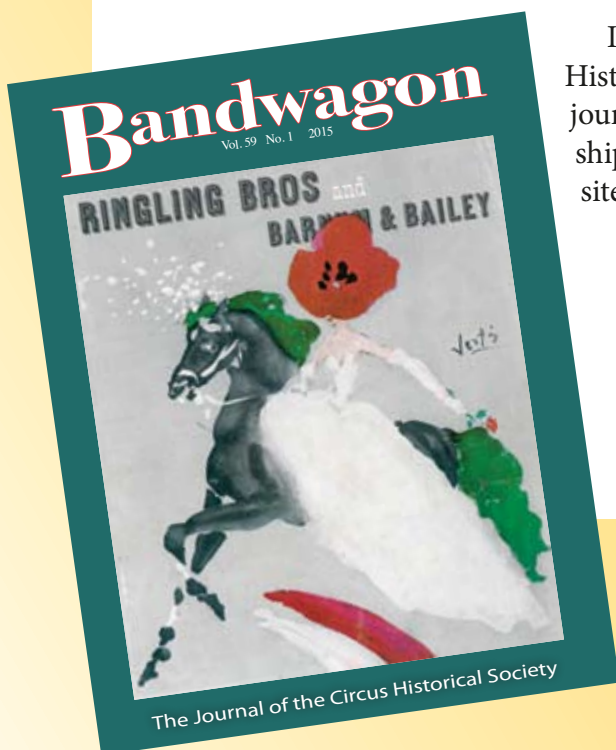
At the annual convention, often held at locations significant in circus history, members hear papers and panel discussions on circus history, explore library and museum circus collections, and interact with the industry's movers and shakers. Many circus greats have enlivened recent conventions. The Stuart Thayer Prize, which recognizes the best scholarship about the circus, is awarded at each conference. An auction of circus memorabilia is also a popular feature of each annual get together.

If you love the circus, past or present, then the Circus Historical Society is for you. Begin your own fascinating journey to the past by filling out the enclosed membership application or register online using the Society website, www.circushistory.org

We look forward to welcoming you as a member.

Questions?

Bob Cline
Circus Historical Society
2707 Zoar Road
Cheraw SC 29520



An invitation to journey into circus history

Bandwagon
The Journal of the Circus Historical Society Vol. 62 No. 3 2018



Bandwagon
The Journal of the Circus Historical Society Vol. 62 No. 1 2018



Bandwagon
The Journal of the Circus Historical Society Vol. 61 No. 1 2017



Bandwagon
The Journal of the Circus Historical Society Vol. 62 No. 2 2018



Bandwagon
Vol. 58 No. 4 2014



Bandwagon
The Journal of the Circus Historical Society Vol. 62 No. 2 2018



Take a look at what you can enjoy

Circus Historical Society

Published for over 77 years, *Bandwagon* offers thoughtful pieces on all aspects of the circus, including the business, artistic and logistical sides. All articles are well illustrated with historic photos and vintage memorabilia.



Al G. Barnes
Circus News 1935

by Ray Harris

Circus Ray Harris didn't leave much of a paper trail. Everything we have about him happened in a ten year period. He was on the Al G. Barnes Circus as early as 1929 and as late as 1938. He spent the 1937 season on Hagahak-Wallace. He had ambition. From letters to circus fan Bert Wilson in early 1936, we know he and an angel were considering taking out a road show. He wanted a bad writer and didn't lack for opinion. He wouldn't join the Circus in 1938 because of "bad names and loose and parades," and later that year had no time for union efforts to organize the performers on Barnes. "The guy who started all this union thing," he commented, "should be strung up in my estimation." In 1935 he sent Wilson the typewritten letter about events on the Barnes Circus in Canada from June 29 to July 21. Some changes in punctuation have been made and the spelling has been regularized. Otherwise the document is the same as what he sent Wilson.



The Barnes show had weather problems in 1935 before entering Canada. The front baggage wagon is mired in mud at Hollywood, California on April 8. All photos from Fleming Archives.

Saturday, June 29—Regina, Sask. Showing outside the exhibition grounds in front of the buildings of which were quartered 1500 Northwest Mounted Police, there to try to preserve order, due to some 4000 relief camp strikers in there on their "On to Ottawa" march (the on Boma marchers) they were stopped them and the

bandwagon will not let them proceed to Ottawa. The town people are not allowed to feed them or help them in any way. We were told not to talk to them. An air of expected trouble prevailed all over town and more so on the lot, as members of the strikers were there watching to set up, etc. We were glad to get out of town and a good thing that we did as the next day (Sunday) there was fighting on the streets with one killed, numerous hurt and thousands of dollars damage to the buildings in the heart of town. No trouble for us, however.

Sunday, June 30—Run into Winnipeg. In at 4 p.m. and up town in time to see thousands of other marchers coming into town on their "On to Ottawa" march still the air of expected trouble prevailing. That evening the marchers were informed that they would not be allowed to leave town. They proceeded to "take" a local soup kitchen and told the police that they would not leave the

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**IN DAYS OF OLD:
THE LANDMARK SEASON
OF 1918**
by Chris Berry

One hardly knows where to commence, so many happenings and so unusual the season that it will go down in circus history as the most eventful and surprising.

Fletcher Smith, New York Clipper, December 25, 1918

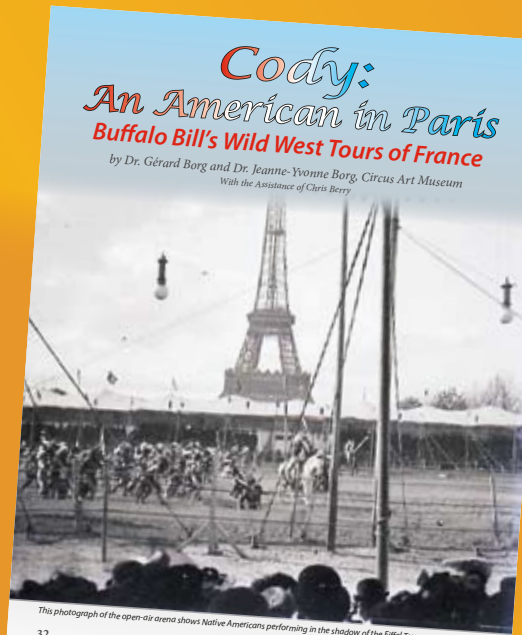
As American circuses limped into winter quarters at the end of 1917, the future of outdoor entertainment was very much in doubt. During Barnum & Bailey's engagement at Madison Square Garden the previous April, the United States had declared war on Germany, and in the months that followed the mobilization intensified and the nation's railroads and workforce became increasingly strained. Locomotives that had once transported brightly painted parade wagons were now coupled to troop trains, shipping the matériel of war from coast to coast.

It has been said that civilization changed forever in 1918, and metaphorically, the American circus did too. The innocence that had existed during the Victorian era vanished in carnage that claimed some 20 million lives "over there." On the battlefields of Europe, homes were traded for tanks, and machine guns replaced sabers, foreshadowing the mechanization and modernization of the circus. When influenza swept across the country, traveling shows that had long been welcomed in villages and towns were shunned because of the threat of disease carried by outsiders and the crowds that they attracted.

If 1918 was the beginning of a new era in world history, it was also a defining year for the American circus.

Shortly after the U.S. entered World War I, it became apparent that the nation's railroads were inadequate to serve the war effort, and on December 26, 1917 President Woodrow Wilson nationalized the railroads, putting the government in charge of every mile of track and each locomotive and box car owned by the nation's private railway companies. Every engineer, brakeman and conductor now took his orders from Washington. Even the railroads and terminals were under total control of the federal government. As the new year began, the New York Clipper questioned whether circuses that operated their own private trains would be classified by the government as non-essential and whether railroads would refuse to transport the shows.

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Cody:
An American in Paris
Buffalo Bill's Wild West Tours of France
by Dr. Gérard Borg and Dr. Jeanne-Yvonne Borg, Circus Art Museum
With the Assistance of Chris Berry

This photograph of the open-air arena shows Native Americans performing in the shadow of the Eiffel Tower.

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the biggest
circus history.



A Clown Remembers
The Ringling Sleepers
by Jackie LeClaire

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Special Collections
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ian, died. Art lived there with
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was training with C. D. Curtis,
and worked as a YMCA coach,
eing a star trapeze performer
ted to hear. He applied himself

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Clyde Beatty... in Hollywood
by Dave Price

At the crest of his popularity, Clyde Beatty's name was known to virtually every American. I cannot emphasize that point too much, particularly in discussing his early motion pictures, as they were short on substance and primarily showcases for the public to see Beatty working with the big cats.

Clyde Beatty rose to fame during his years with the Hagahak-Wallace Circus (1925-1934). In the last four of those seasons he appeared at the Ringling-Barnum Madison Square Garden dates, bringing him to the attention of writers from many national publications. In 1932 Beatty collaborated with prominent author Edward Anthony in writing *The Big Cats*, his first book. Anthony had already helped Frank Buck attain international acclaim and he set out to do the same with Beatty. Before the book was off the presses, plans were already underway for a movie of the same name to be produced by Universal Pictures under the guiding hands of Carl Laemmle, Sr. and Jr.

The Big Cage

Universal Pictures, 1933
Presented by Carl Laemmle
Produced by Carl Laemmle, Jr.
Directed by Karl Newman
Written by Edward Anthony, Clyde Beatty,
Clarence Marks and Ferdinand Reyher

Although not much of a
mystery by today's standards,
the movie did show Beatty
in many situations with lions
and tigers. Apparently his
popularity was such that
no great plot was thought
required by the producers.

The story takes place almost
entirely at the winter quarters
of the almost bankrupt John
Whipple Circus, complete
with a cat barn interior
modeled after that at Peris,
Indiana. The story is centered
around Beatty's training what

the movie refers to as
the first ever mixing
of lion and tiger in
one arena.

Although the
publicity gave
Anita Page second
billing (as Roman
Ring performer
Lillian Langley)
and she is shown
behind Beatty in
the posters, there
was no romance
between the two;
rather she had
an on-again-off-
again affair with
one Ben Perry
(Wallace Ford),
a washed-up
trapeze artist who
had lost his
nerve.

Two
principal
characters
are circus owner
John Whipple (Reginald Barlow) and his banker Henry
Cameron (Robert McWick), who was expected to finance Beatty's

Three pictorial themes were followed in the
posters for *The Big Cage*. This one shows Beatty as
he really appeared. Another poster was made, but
showed Beatty with his shirt half ripped off and his
legs longer.

The only time in *The Big Cage* that Beatty wore this style uniform
was when he doubled for actor Raymond Hatton.

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Pinito del Oro
The Spanish Star of the Swinging Trapeze
by Greg Parkinson

Stunning aerial artistry, a beaming personality, and a genuine passion for performing perilous maneuvers on a lofty trapeze bar – it was a combination that made her a beloved big-top performer. Her breathtaking presentation appeared effortless and was the epitome of grace and daring. Working at dizzying heights without a net or safety device of any kind, she thrilled audiences on both sides of the Atlantic. She fell to the ring several times during her career, yet after each of these mishaps she returned to her trade. She was called "the Spanish Angel" and in the mid-20th century, Pinito del Oro reigned as one of the world's greatest circus stars.

Cristina Maria del Pino Segura Gomez was born on November 6, 1931 in Las Palmas, the capital of Gran Canaria, one of Spain's Canary Islands. She was

Pinito and her husband Juan during their first season with Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey.

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